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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

The Inhuman Use of Human Beings

A Statement on Embryo Research
by the Ramsey Colloquium

The Giving Tree

A Symposium

William F. May
Amy A. Kass
Marc Gellman
Midge Decter
Gilbert Meilaender
Mary Ann Glendon
William Werpehowski
Timothy Fuller
Leon R. Kass
Timothy P. Jackson
Jean Bethke Elshtain
Richard John Neuhaus

The Challenge of the Catechism

Avery Dulles

Natural Law and a Nihilistic Culture

Carl F. H. Henry

Opinions and Reviews

James Nuechterlein
Benjamin Wittes
K. L. Billingsley
Peter J. Leithart
Peter L. Berger
Janet Marsden
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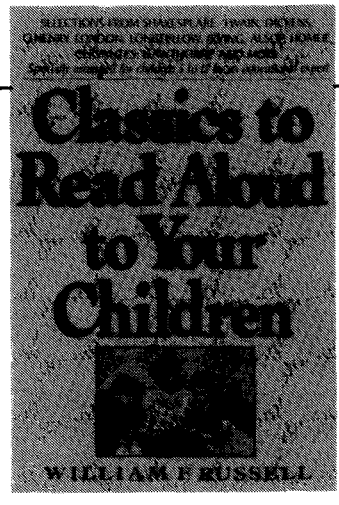

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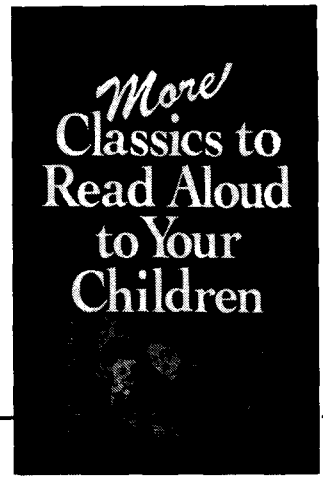

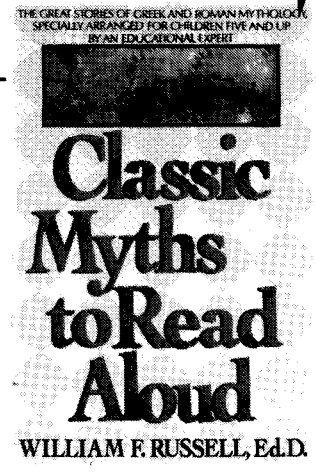
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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

JANUARY 1995 / Number 49

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Editor-in-Chief: *Richard John Neuhaus*
Editor: *James Nuechterlein*
Managing Editor: *Matthew Berke*
Poetry Editor: *Jill P. Baumgaertner*
Publisher: *Institute on Religion and Public Life*
Publishing Service: *Publishing Management Associates*

FIRST THINGS: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life (ISSN #1047-5141) is published monthly (except for combined issues June/July and August/September) for $29 per year by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010. Second class postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: send address changes to FIRST THINGS: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. FT, Denville, NJ 07834. **Editorial Offices:** The Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010. **Editorial Phone:** (212) 627-1985. **Advertising Offices:** 129 Phelps Avenue, Suite 312, Rockford, IL 61108. **Advertising Phone:** (815) 398-8569. **Subscription Department:** P.O. Box 3000, Dept. FT, Denville, NJ 07834. 1-800-783-4903. Unsolicited material cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870.

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FIRST THINGS is published by Religion and Public Life, an interreligious, nonpartisan research and education institute whose purpose is to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society. RPL also sponsors scholars conferences, consultations, research projects, public educational events, and a fellows program.

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Mean-Spirited?

I have just received the October 1994 issue of First Things. As usual it was filled with much food for thought and serious consideration. Until I came to the article by Peter L. Berger, "Toward a Disease-Free America."

The degree of malice shown in this oh-so-clever little piece of fiction is frightening. It is certainly not the usual tone of the articles in your journal. I am of course aware that the political expression of your beliefs is most logically found in the Republican Party. This is well and good. Where I do not agree, I can normally see where you are coming from and why. But this is not a reasoned argument about facts to be weighed and considered. This comes over as an expression of bias and meanness. . . .

With all of the areas of valid criticism and discussion, why would you feel called upon to indulge in such divisive and mean-spirited nonsense?

P. Tyler
Los Angeles, CA

My first vote was cast in a fourth-grade straw poll: Hoover against Roosevelt. To this day I have never voted for a Democrat. I deplore food faddists and other hypochondriacs, intrusive government, and freedom-hating liberals. We do seem to have been spared Big Brother only to be smothered by Mighty Mother.

Nevertheless I find Peter L. Berger's diatribe in very bad taste. Even "Doonesbury" rarely descends to that level. One expects more finesse in First Things.

Robert C. Tompkins
Towson, MD

Roman Numerals & Orthodoxies

Jeffrey Burke Satinover ("Jungians and Gnostics," October 1994) got tripped up in his Roman numerals: The apt quotation heading his article comes from Pope St. Pius X, not Pius VI, as printed. That latter sad figure had his own problems to deal with, in the form of revolutionary France.

Yet although the figures are a century apart, one is struck by a connection: The outright denial or (what amounts to the same thing) the radical immanentizing of the supernatural is one pestiferous fruit of the Enlightenment; it also happens to be a quite serviceable definition of Modernism. The two Pius gardeners condemned that noxious growth root and branch.

Then again, perhaps the explanation for the misprint is simpler: It's just First Things living up to its name. Where else can one see a Jungian psychiatrist make a Freudian slip?

P. M. Aliazzi
Hunting Valley, OH

While I had few difficulties with Jeffrey Burke Satinover's discussion of Jung and Freud, and only somewhat more with his incomplete characterization of the Gnostics, I found his larger discussion of historical issues since the Renaissance, indeed since the founding of Christianity, troublesome. Those issues, which he describes as monotheism versus paganism, cannot be reduced to such a simplistic polarity; they are both more subtle and infinitely more complex. Contrary to the view presented, there is no "single historical line" of the sort Satinover argues, i.e., from "the pagan religions of the ancient Near East . . . to the modern reduction of spirit to psyche and/or soma. . . ."

We need to remember, for example, that the early Church and the early Church Fathers (Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, et al.) adapted to Christianity a great deal from pagan antiquity that was not perceived to be alien to the beliefs of this not yet altogether formed religious movement. Significant aspects of pagan antiquity were powerful and formative forces in the early Church. Stoicism, Mithraism, and the philosophy of Plato serve as examples. This process (a form of syncretism?) was to be an identifiable dimension of what historians describe as the medieval Christian synthesis.

We also need to remember that there is much to be cherished in what Dr. Satinover regards as the "resur-

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gence of paganism" since the Renaissance. At least until the Reformation (and perhaps not much even then), the Church hardly deserves accolades for fostering the spirit of tolerance, for the emergence of the principles of critical scholarship, for democratic government and the idea of popular sovereignty, for the ideals of social justice, or for the affirmation of cultural diversity. One assumes these are of value, both to secular humanists and to biblical literalists. Progress may be a myth, but modernity is to be credited with more than simply the wonders of science and technology; and it has more to it than the secular focus of much of modern thought.

The essential narrowness of medieval Christian orthodoxy, and of more recent biblical literalism, I believe, is no more to be admired than the shallowness and eventual emptiness of contemporary secularism. If modernist, reductionist, secular thought has contributed to the horrors of this past century, which it has, let us not forget that the bigotry and exclusivity in monotheistic religious movements—from medieval times to the present—have contributed their share as well. I find strident and insistent orthodoxies, whether Christian or secular, frightening and dangerous. At the least, and whatever the mask, they are characterized by an insufferable self-righteousness. Are we really faced with the either/or of someone's traditionalist orthodoxy or someone else's secular/materialist orthodoxy? . . .

Robert W. Heywood
Flint, MI

Onward Christian Soldiers?

James Nuechterlein declares himself a soldier in a cultural war ("Life at the Intellectual Barricades," October 1994). Many people have taken it on themselves to go to war on behalf of the Prince of Peace and I'll assume that Mr. Nuechterlein does not intend to rehearse that ancient confusion. But then the question remains: for whom is he fighting?

He could not be fighting for Christ, armed, as he says he is, with an ideology. In the context of faith all ideologies, no matter how noble or necessary they may seem, are idolatrous; the cross confounds them all. Why was the Son of God crucified if we could be redeemed through an ideology? In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither feminist nor antifeminist, neither gay nor straight.

Mr. Nuechterlein confirms this when he says that God does not take sides in "the wars of the earthly city." He acknowledges that God is "unambiguously" immaterial to the reasoning involved in the intellectual passion that animates FIRST THINGS. I am accordingly left without any sense of why FIRST THINGS would describe itself as a *religious* journal. Mr. Nuechterlein is welcome to publish a journal about neoconservative ideology and public life. But to conflate this enterprise with religion is to suggest that the cross of Christ is of no effect and that God's love is somehow abridged.

As for me, I pray for the strength to be a conscientious objector in this cultural war. I pray for the courage to create compassion where there is fear, and love where there is anger. And I have faith that Christ Jesus will be found with the despised and the excluded wherever they may be.

Mark Copithorne
Berkeley, CA

One has a good deal of sympathy for James Nuechterlein as he explains both the need for engaging in polemics and the ensuing sense of aloneness that can accompany this. But the heart sinks when he goes on to claim that he has an ideology, his friends have an ideology, his opponents have an ideology, we all perforce must have an ideology.

Once one abandons the notion that there is a truth that the mind can know, that it is external to the self rather than shaped by the self, and that one can pursue this truth passionately but disinterestedly—then he has abandoned the very positions he believes himself to be defending. The illusion that "we" can be "flexible and self-critical" about our "necessary frameworks" underlies a large part of our contemporary intellectual malaise.

If all we have are competing ideologies, then there is no truth; and polemics are little more than assertion. Reassertion of intellectual error is of small help in resisting the evils of this world.

Brian Barbour
Providence College
Providence, RI

The October 1994 issue of FIRST THINGS seemed to reflect extraordinary concern (both censure and defense) about the kind of aggressive moral, theological, and social critique often demonstrated in the journal. . . .

I hope you never blunt the wit and humor with which FIRST THINGS confronts the pseudosophisticated presumption of infallible cleverness that infests so much of modern society. I'm amazed at the prevalence of a severe speech impediment among the pundits of modernity—their inability to pronounce common words like *piety, morality, reverence, medieval,* or *Puritan* without curling the upper lip. The Church need not retaliate in the same spirit of contempt, but it is high time we identify the insecurities of extended adolescence that have made irreverence trendy among chronological adults in our society. Rebelling against established moral and religious values in the late twentieth century is merely fashionable. It's a little like rebelling against our parents, but it takes less courage—and no intelligence. . . .

Norman E. Dunkle
Hadley, PA

Right and Left on Cuba

I am continually astounded at the simplemindedness of Americans such as Thomas C. Oden ("Fidel and the Faithful," October 1994) who visit Cuba once and, Jimmy Carter-like, deem their visit of such profundity as to allow them to pontificate.

So Cuba reminds Mr. Oden of 1930s Oklahoma? Well, try as I might, this Cuban recalls nowhere in the history of that state where Soon-

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ers risked death by taking to the seas in journeys on rickety rafts where two out of three perished. Nor do I recall any Governor of Oklahoma installing himself in office without benefit of election and over the bodies of thousands killed by firing squad and over 200,000 penned up in a Gulag for refusing "reeducation."

Mr. Oden's Methodist conscience may be soothed by what the Vichy religious collaborators in Cuba—Catholic and Protestant alike—tell him. They have been coopted by the government for the past thirty-five years, in much the same way as the Church was coopted in every Communist country (save proud Poland from whence, not coincidentally, came our Pope). . . .

Where has Mr. Oden been since 1959? Only recently has the Castro regime relaxed its grip on religious freedom—as did Stalin when it suited him: when the Germans were invading and he needed the Church to help him rally the faithful to defend his regime (er, Mother Russia). Castro is likewise cynically willing to allow anything that will preserve his political control. The coopted pastors fit the bill perfectly. You'll never hear them saying anything that goes against the party line. Never. Not for nothing did Mr. Oden's fellow Ecumenical Seminarians get the three meals a day he describes. . . .

Joseph Rumbaut
Houston, TX

The reference by Thomas Oden to Cuba's "desperate poverty created by socialism" is shocking. Has this professor never taken Economics 101? The poverty in Cuba has stemmed in large part from the economic policies of the United States toward Cuba since the Revolution of 1959, especially the embargo on sugar imports, which had been one of the major dollar-revenue sources for the Cuban economy.

In a visit to Cuba during the Carter Administration when travel to Cuba by American citizens was legalized, I saw the Cuban economy surviving fairly well with the aid of Soviet subsidies. Now that they are ended, the goal of American foreign policy will be achieved, which is to bring not democracy but corporate capitalism back into Cuba. The gross inequity of income distribution under Batista will follow, and Oden and his lot will be able to sing their praises to the Lord filled with angel cake and rum. The biblical religions will then, once again, thrive as the "opium of the masses," as Marx described it.

Robert Lyon
Professor Emeritus
Temple University
Philadelphia, PA

Thomas C. Oden replies:

These two letters from the right (Joseph Rumbaut) and left (Robert Lyon) epitomize just how difficult it is to engage in civil discourse on Cuba. They remind us of how hazardous it is to offer a description of the Cuban religious situation without being immediately enveloped in overheated political rhetoric. They show just how adversarial the arena becomes when anything but the usual arguments (on either side) are put forward. In this instance, vast assumptions wholly alien to my thinking are attributed to me by opposing disputants.

The obsolete and thwarted left (Lyon) assumes I idealize capitalism and Batista, while the enraged and dated right (Rumbaut) assumes I am an apologist for socialism and Castro, when I am neither. Both are tendentious responses to an account that neither celebrates American foreign policy nor romanticizes Vichy-like collaborators who have long ago been cast out of the Protestant leadership. Thus what might have been a dialogue on the religious possibility in Cuba deteriorates once again into a political diatribe that fails to recognize the actual spiritual reversal occurring in Cuba—which was the main object of my report.

Was Jesus Anti-Semitic?

Commenting on the Pontifical Biblical Commission document *Interpreting the Bible in the Church* in the context of fighting anti-Semitism, Jon D. Levenson states ("Interpreting the Bible: Three Views," August/September 1994): "There is no substitute for the cauterization through historical criticism of the virulent anti-Semitic statements that have been put in the mouth of Jesus. Without this, the Church's denunciations of anti-Semitism ring hollow."

If I understand correctly, Mr. Levenson's judgment (and, on the basis of his previous writings in FIRST THINGS, he seems to be a judicious and reasonable man) is that the gospels are "virulently" anti-Semitic, and he wants the Church to say that they bear no relation to the teachings of Jesus. Mr. Levenson wants the Church to say, in the interest of curbing anti-Semitism, that the sacred writers put the wrong words in the mouth of our Lord in the service of their local quarrels. But what the Church proclaims is the exact opposite of what Mr. Levenson pretends. What the Church proclaims is that the statements he calls anti-Semitic were not only spoken by God the Son, but also that they were set down by the sacred writers under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit "for our instruction."

And in this vein, wouldn't the Old Testament also be called anti-Semitic (e.g., the Prophets and especially Jeremiah)? Given the condition of our fallen nature, if the Scriptures had developed in, say, the U.S., wouldn't they be called anti-American? I believe they would; I believe they would be making the same statements on the deficiencies of the American character as we find in the Bible in reference to the Jewish character. . . .

I am afraid the solution suggested by Mr. Levenson is the classic case of "kicking against the goad" and bears no hope for the end of anti-Semitism, or at least for anti-Semitism as defined by Mr. Levenson.

L. F. Caso
Worthington, OH

Jon D. Levenson replies:

Mr. Caso's disagreement is not, in the first place, with me, but with the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which pronounced historical criticism of the Bible indispensable and opposed fundamentalism unequivo-

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cally. Its position necessarily entails assessing the authenticity of every statement ascribed to Jesus or anyone else. To the extent that the Commission's document reflects the teaching of the Catholic Church, that Church thus proclaims something very different from what Mr. Caso thinks.

I never claimed that New Testament anti-Semitism is unparalleled, but I do think that the parallels fail to provide the exculpation that Mr. Caso finds in them. Reading that anti-Semitism with an awareness of its very particular, original context does not necessarily deprive the Church of any of its Scripture, but it does help to overcome the tenacious legacy of defamation, hate, and violence that critical scholars find difficult to reconcile with the authentic teachings of Jesus.

A Plea for Tolerance

Free Inquiry recently quoted Richard John Neuhaus as telling secular humanists, "Your rights are secured by our understanding of the truth, even if ours are not by yours."

As a secular humanist, I am truly sorry that we have given religious believers so much cause for concern. I want to assure you that not all secular humanists are hostile to individual rights and freedom of conscience. As a reporter, editor, and editorial columnist on various Southern newspapers, I have always urged my fellow secular humanists toward tolerance and respect for the rights of all.

I grant you that secular humanism's past does not give religious believers much confidence. Our hatred of Muslims led us to kill many of them in the Crusades. Our hatred of dissenters led us to burn millions at the stake and devastate much of Europe in the Thirty Years and Huguenot wars. Our hatred of Jews was the cause of those horrible pogroms, ending in that nightmare when European secular humanists slaughtered millions of Jews in the Holocaust. Secular humanists' hatred of women led us to burn as many as two million at the stake, after falsely convicting them in kangaroo courts of being witches.

We have not been friends to freedom either. That great skeptic the Emperor Justinian banned all religious materials and freedom of conscience, warning Christians, "It is more than enough [for them] that we allow them to live." I'm aware the Alexandrian freethinker Cyril sent a band of atheists to drag the devoutly Christian St. Hypatia into his Secular Humanist center and torture her to death for daring to speak out against skepticism. We are guilty too of burning the great libraries of the ancient world, not to mention when we torched the Mayan libraries—the collected literature and history of an entire people. Secular humanists certainly committed genocide against the Mayans, as well as American Indians generally, for desiring to worship gods of which we disapproved.

Skeptics can never make amends for those atrocities; we can only pledge to do our best to ensure they don't happen again. I certainly don't approve of those deeds, and I can't recall any contemporary secular humanist speaking in favor of them. I think we are developing morally. Yet, I realize that our history makes it difficult for you to trust us. I'm aware that, for instance, in 1572, when the French Huguenots made a truce with the secular humanist government, my philosophical ancestors soon violated the peace by trying to murder all the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day. That shameful incident, however, is part of the past.

That's why I say that Chief Atheist George Bush was *not* speaking for me when he declared that "Christians cannot be good citizens." Nor did the agnostic Pat Buchanan represent my views when he called upon his fellow secular humanists to launch a jihad against Christians. I've even read that one secular humanist thinker has argued that Christians cannot be good citizens because they cannot give a compelling moral account of the regime of which they are a part.

I assure you, the bigoted hubris of these people is not representative of most secular humanists. I acknowledge those claims are false: Christians *can* be good citizens. Secular humanists may have denied this for a long time, but Christians civilized us in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. In fact, many major Judeo-Christian thinkers—Ptahhotep, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, John Dewey, Paul Kurtz, and Sidney Hook—have clearly argued the need for people to be conscientious citizens of their nations. . . .

Just because secular humanists have not always lived up to their ideals—such as when we persecuted the anti-Chalcedonians of the Middle East in the seventh century, thereby generating unnecessary conflicts which allowed Islam to take over—does not mean that *all* secular humanists are such despicable bigots. That peculiar arrogance by which secular humanists in centuries past believed they had sole access to the truth about the universe, thereby claiming the right to kill anyone who dissented—such as St. Giordano Bruno—and attack anyone who challenged our views—such as St. Copernicus or St. Darwin—is seen in just a minority of modern skeptics. David Koresh and Jim Jones are *not* representative of modern secular humanist thinking. . . .

In summary, give us the benefit of the doubt. We know we've been bad, but that's changed. If we regain complete control of the U.S., as we've been trying to do since the Enlightenment, your rights will be safe. We won't burn witches, as we did at Salem; or persecute Quakers, as Virginia atheists did in the eighteenth century when the dissenters refused to pay the state-mandated Secular Humanist Centers tax. We would allow Christians to testify in court, even though nineteenth-century secular humanist judges sometimes banned religious believers from being heard. All that is history. I think I speak for most secular humanists when I say we're civilized.

Please don't be paranoid. Our past does not predict our future. I just hope the past does not predict Christianity's future.

William Sierichs, Jr.
Baton Rouge, LA

Richard John Neuhaus replies:

All right, but we're keeping an eye on you.

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Fight for Christian Rights

I was surprised by Richard John Neuhaus' apparent approval of prayer in public classrooms, in answering Rabbi Forman's letter (October 1994).

I am a lifelong practicing Christian, but I have long been dismayed by the advocacy among religious people of the inclusion of prayer in the curriculum of public schools. To me such a request is abject grovelling for crumbs from the public table spread by tax monies. We should, instead, demand our fair share of the taxes we pay for education. We have to accept the kind of curricula dictated by public school boards, however abominable to us, or else pay a second time for a private school. American parents should not supinely accept the provably unconstitutional deprivation of their right to "procure their children instruction which they consider important," a right proclaimed by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Farrington v. Tokishige*, 1927). . . .

Donald Cumming
Elizabeth, NJ

The Great Fear Revisited

Richard John Neuhaus' screed against Joseph Sobran ("Jews, Christians, and 'The Great Fear,'" Public Square, October 1994) answers the question "what happened to Joe Sobran." In short, he has been pariahtized for "his flirtation with anti-Semitic language and sentiment." Sobran's fate has made his case.

It is indeed strange that, in the heyday of liberal thought, one cannot rationally discuss the phenomenon of Jewish leverage in American society. I suspect that this very thought, once penned, dooms me to Sobran's fate.

Nevertheless, these impure thoughts will not go away. There are festering questions in the minds of many that, unspoken and unresolved, tend to produce "anti-Semitic sentiments." It seems to me, then, imperative that in order to prevent a resurgence of real anti-Semitism that the Jewish community and the intellectual community at large address these questions.

Apart from the influence of the Israeli lobby on public policy, there are nagging questions about the ACLU and the entertainment media. Many believe that these two entities, which are perceived to be dominated by Jews, are largely responsible for the moral collapse of society that has brought us such suffering. Neuhaus alludes to these concerns but his treatment comes across largely as apologetic toadying. . . .

Gerard V. Metzger
Haddon Heights, NJ

As a fan of both Joseph Sobran and Richard John Neuhaus, it was distressing to me to read the latter upbraiding the former, allegedly for writing about the "sinister influence of Jews" (Neuhaus' phrase). It was doubly distressing to see the usually razor-sharp Neuhaus using innuendo and strained interpretations in an attempt to make this very serious charge credible. . . .

The essay becomes particularly confused toward the end, where Neuhaus implies there is no taboo on this subject because Sobran himself is writing about it. But Neuhaus goes on to say, "Those who criticize Israel and U.S. policy toward Israel must give believable evidence that they really care about the security of Israel. . . . There is a taboo. . . . [T]he imperative to guard against the possible destruction of three million more Jews is not an open question." This is breathtakingly tendentious! The reference to mass extinction implicitly paints Arabs as bloodthirsty barbarians who would not just defeat the Israeli army if they could, but slaughter every man, woman, and child. What if this concern for Israeli security earns the U.S. many dangerous enemies or, as it has in the past, pulls us onto a collision course with another nuclear power? Does the U.S. have similar undebatable obligations to stop large-scale killing in Cambodia, China, Rwanda, Bosnia? If a writer criticizes Turkey or Argentina or Afghanistan or Indonesia does he also have to evince evidence that he cares about their security? If Vatican City were threatened would its defense be unquestionably in the U.S. interest? Why exactly is Israeli security, above that of all other nations, so much an American obligation that "writers who seem not to care . . . are viewed as beyond the pale, and rightly so"?

The whole article is a tissue of innuendo, uncharitable interpretation, and unexamined assumptions, and goes a long way toward proving Sobran's point. I honestly do not know what it is about the subject that so clouds clear minds. But I do know that both Sobran and Neuhaus are valuable contributors to the cultural conversation, that both regularly have insights on a variety of subjects that I find nowhere else, and that somewhere there is an injunction against criticizing the mote in your brother's eye.

Michael J. Behe
Bethlehem, PA

I am puzzled by the lengthy criticism in Father Neuhaus' column of a minor conservative figure, Mr. Joseph Sobran. Mr. Sobran has been attacked, whether directly or by implication, as an anti-Semite by William F. Buckley and now by Father Neuhaus. The principal basis of the charge seems to be Mr. Sobran's call for greater caution in our support of Israel.

It should be pointed out that both in his writings and his talks Mr. Sobran has repeatedly and consistently criticized the ease with which the United States resorts to military force. In his view our government goes to war even when there is no immediate threat to the nation. Various Administrations, in pursuit of their war policies, whether in Vietnam or Iraq, circumvent or ignore the Constitution, which was carefully designed to make it difficult for the United States to go to war. The tragedies of the rest of the world are heartrending, whether the disaster be the Holocaust or the civil-war-induced famine in Somalia. But the President of the United States is not an earthly Providence, and should use the utmost caution in sending young Americans to die.

The bitter fruit of anti-Semitism in the destruction of European Jewry, and the conflict between Jew and

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Arab in the Middle East, are matters for prayer, but are not sufficient justification for the United States to enter into entangling alliances that may get many young Americans killed. I believe that this is a fair summary of Mr. Sobran's position. It puts into context his fear that the pro-Israeli lobby among Americans Jews may get us involved in a war, and his suspicion, which Father Neuhaus' odd criticism can only feed, that neoconservatives are trying to win a hearing for their social agenda among secularized Jews by demonstrating a willingness to support Israel even at the cost of American lives.

Leon J. Podles
Baltimore, MD

Lay Off the Jesuits

It is with dismay that I read the comments in the May and June/July 1994 issues of First Things regarding the Society of Jesus.

The tone was aggressive and snide. To have pursued comments made about *preliminary* discussions for the 1995 General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, and to have deemed them worthy of critical comment in print, seems to be going out of one's way to pick a fight. Perhaps it would be prudent to allow the meeting, and the collective process of prayerful discernment involved therein, to actually occur before providing editorial space for negative comment about an organization whose members have manifested a level of moral commitment that has been, and continues to be, at times heroic.

Richard J. Rodeheffer, M.D.
Rochester, MN

Racing Down the Slope

Re: Richard John Neuhaus, "To Step Gingerly Over the Cliff" (Public Square, October 1994): What you have overlooked in your discussion of euthanasia is that direct killing is merely the tip of the iceberg: the most common form of euthanasia in the Netherlands is covert physician killing.

The data from the Remmelink Commission indeed show that 1,000 people a year die from "medical decisions to end life without an explicit request." But a closer examination shows that 25 percent of all Dutch deaths come prematurely because the physician—not the family or the patient—decided to end life, and used indirect means. This includes neglect, nontreatment decisions such as withholding antibiotics from nursing home patients, or slow but deliberate overdose of narcotic-sedatives in much higher doses than are needed for pain control.

Few discussions of euthanasia have examined the societal implications of this, perhaps because few are aware of the extent of the problem. Indeed, the cover-up of the Remmelink report by certain medical journals is one of the major untold stories in journalism.

There may be several reasons why covert means are used to end lives even though "medical decisions to end life" are rarely prosecuted under the law in the Netherlands. First, since it is quite easy for a physician or other health care provider to end life indirectly and covertly, why bother with all that paperwork and hassle? Second, the *Lancet* article on the Remmelink Commission report notes that emotional distress is common in Dutch physicians performing euthanasia. Indirect and covert killing is easier for the conscience, since it is easier to deny to oneself that one is actually killing: the deed can easily be viewed as merely a variation of normal medical treatment.

In some medical centers in this country the modern ethical trends have already loosened the taboo against taking life, and as a result there are areas where physicians already use such indirect means to end lives.

This may be why Derek Humphry, who apparently feels that if he can persuade physicians that since everyone dies anyway it must be okay, recently wrote a letter to *American Medical News* (August 15, 1994) claiming that we should not condemn the Netherlands since physician-induced death is just as common in this country as in the Netherlands.

Of course, one suspects the veracity of Humphry, but it does bring up an interesting question. In the Netherlands there is little peer review of medical practice, and most euthanasia deaths are done at the home by the family doctor. In America, however, most people die in hospitals, where deaths are reviewed by insurance/medicare bureaucrats, peer review, ambulance-chasing lawyers, greedy relatives, headline-hungry district attorneys, and aggressive nurses.

If Humphry thinks widespread euthanasia occurs despite all of these, why do he and others promoting a pro-euthanasia agenda insist that the sick will be protected by further regulation?

Indeed, one marvels at the obliviousness of some ethicists who blithely dismiss worries about the slippery slope. Apparently they see the public as the faceless masses who will blindly go along with whatever is done by those in authority, because it is being done for their own good.

Maybe so. But I shudder to think what might happen when rumors start that white doctors are killing black patients at Detroit General.

N. K. O'Connor, M.D.
Nanty Glo, PA

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THIS TIME

The Wide World of Sports

James Nuechterlein

It all began—as did so many other bad things—in the sixties. It was during that obsessively political decade that sportswriters apparently decided that if they were to be thought of as Serious People, they would have to become seriously political—while they remained sportswriters. And so we got, for the first time, the sportswriter as social critic. The malady is with us still, and it threatens to make reading the sports pages, normally a welcome diversion from real life, as grim an exercise as forcing one's way through the latest atrocities in Bosnia or idiocies within the Beltway.

I was living in Canada during the sixties, and it made the problem worse. Canadian writers on sports, especially American sports, not only caught the seriousness bug—they compounded it with the anti-Americanism that is the most enduring element in the Canadian identity. The Vietnam War was a godsend to Canadians. It allowed them fully to indulge the sense of moral superiority over the Empire to the South that justifies the existence of an otherwise improbable nation. Canadian sportswriters focused especially, for some reason, on pro football, the Super Bowl in particular. It became the Ur-symbol of American imperialism, the embodiment of the mindlessness, garishness, commercialism, brutality, and general wretched excess that, for many Canadians, summarizes life south of the forty-ninth parallel. (They could even drag in racism: why were there no black quarterbacks?) The terms of the game—blitz, long bomb—took on obvious and ominous meaning.

The sixties are gone and I've long since left Canada, but the problem remains. It has, in fact, been exacerbated by the recent baseball and hockey strikes, not to mention the inevitable speculation over what the O. J. Simpson case tells us about the dark underside of American jockdom. These and other stories—which do have to be reported and analyzed, of course—feed the unfortunate propensity of modern sportswriters to regularly deliver themselves of solemnities on the state of the nation as revealed on its playing fields.

Now when sportswriters become social critics, they do not distribute themselves randomly across the political spectrum. They congregate overwhelmingly on the left. Indeed, one might say that the sports pages have joined the mainline churches and the universities as refuges for the left-liberalism that has lost fashion almost everyplace else in American life. Some might argue that my perspective is skewed because my daily newspaper is the *New York Times*. Since everyone else on the *Times* except William Safire is a liberal, why should the sportswriters be any different? But I don't recall that things were otherwise when my regular paper was the *Chicago Tribune*, not normally thought of as knee-jerk liberal in its orientation.

It makes little difference, in my experience, what paper you read. The sportswriters produce a predictable litany concerning America's predominant racism and sexism, and conflicts between labor and management are regularly construed as if we were back in the world of *Waiting for Lefty*, even when, as in the baseball strike, the working stiffs have a median wage of half-a-million dollars a year. Wage slaves, after all, are still wage slaves, and fashionable people know the correct answer to the perennial question, "Which side are you on?" Even when the greed of athletes is acknowledged, the greed of the owners is presented as of a higher, morally more degraded, order.

The specter of political correctness even came close to ruining Ken Burns' otherwise admirable PBS film, *Baseball*. Aside from its tendency to approximate baseball's greatest weakness—is this game ever going to end?—the nine-part documentary most undercut itself by its preachiness. The history of baseball threatened at times to become one long lesson on American racism.

The problem, as in any other presentation of the American past, is one of proportion and perspective. Racism scarred America indelibly; it was not the essence of the national experience. Similarly, it was necessary for Ken Burns to present fully the story of the Negro Leagues and of the exclusion of blacks from major league baseball prior to Jackie Robinson; it was a distortion for him to make those items the centerpiece of the history of the game.

As with so many historical revisionists, Burns falls prey to anachronism. Take, for example, his treatment of Ty Cobb. Cobb was a great player, arguably the greatest hitter of all time. Burns recognizes Cobb's greatness, but he spends disproportionate time emphasizing Cobb's manifold failures as a human being. (No other player receives this treatment. Babe Ruth's whoring and boozing, for example, are acknowledged but implicitly excused as elements in the life of a large-hearted man.) The element of Cobb's nastiness most emphasized by Burns is his racism. But Cobb was born and raised in Georgia, and most white Georgians of his time were, to one degree or another, racists. That historical circumstance doesn't excuse Cobb, but it does make

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his retrograde racial attitudes unremarkable, except for someone insistent on composing a tidy moral tale.

The major issue in all this, it must be emphasized, is not lack of ideological balance. The larger problem, of which sports is but one instance, is the apparently inexorable intrusion of politics into every area of American life, and the problem of pervasive politicization will hardly be cured by signing up Rush Limbaugh as a sports columnist. Conservatives, in any case, are not automatically to be trusted when they address sports. George Will has written marvelously about the national pastime, but it is, finally, a silly conceit to insist that if you are truly to know America, you must know baseball.

Those who write about sports need to impose on themselves a rigorous discipline: resist with self-denying intensity the temptation to treat sports as metaphor, allegory, or anything beyond itself. A cigar, Freud noted, is sometimes just a cigar. Just so, and the Super Bowl is always just a football game. It does not make it less to refuse to make it more.

The grace of sports is that it at least momentarily relieves us—often with genuine delight and joy—from the burdens that life visits on us. (Even if—as, for example, with Cubs or Indians fans—you become familiar less with the thrill of victory than the agony of defeat.) We can lose ourselves without guilt in things, ultimately insignificant, that we nonetheless unreservedly give ourselves over to in a welcome respite from the weight of seriousness. Leave the boys of summer and of other seasons, along with the rest of us, to our games. FT

Mother and Son, Kazakhstan

Men planted mushrooms in our sky,
she says, with much white boiling
of thunder—and seeds, many seeds
that rained down here and here and here
and, after time, grew up into children.

This one, she says, her sleeves rolled
elbow-high for the work of holding him.

Watch the wrinkled linen of her face
and know the work is hard. A face
and a face, his a gouge of bone
under skin wrenched tight as an outgrown
shirt, the buttons splayed to breaking.

Men came like fire and left like smoke,
she says, shifting his melon-heavy head.

What he lacks fills her arms
to overflowing, how he mouths a gaping
story over and over, the same nuclear
vowel rolling out only to curve back in.

Note her red kerchief, the snowdrift
in her hair. If you can, watch his eyes
like dark searchlights crossing, crossing.
This is a test. This is only a test.

Barbara Seaman

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Opinion

The Scent of a Cult

Benjamin Wittes

"The only difference between a cult and a religion is a hundred years," said the editor of a prominent Washington weekly in turning down a proposal for an article on the Church of Scientology. The particular editor in question is devoutly secular, so it's not too surprising that he would paint the issue with such a broad brush. What's far more surprising is the number of religious individuals and organizations who are on record as agreeing with him, either equating religions and cults or insisting on the blurriness of any line that might separate them.

It might seem perverse for honestly religious people to group their faiths with those of the sadists and megalomaniacs who run most cults, but a growing number are doing just that. A substantial sector of religious America, for example, sees the firefight in Waco as an attack on radical religion and places the cutting edge of religious freedom in the defense of cults' free exercise rights.

According to the commonly accepted criteria for defining cults, the line between cults and religions is fuzzy indeed. The Cult Awareness Network (CAN), a Chicago-based clearinghouse of information on cults, identifies the following seven characteristics of "destructive cults": mind control, charismatic leadership, deception, exclusivity, alienation, exploitation, and totalitarian worldview. But as Thomas Taylor writes in *Christianity Today*, "Almost all Christian denominations have some aspects that would fit into the many vague definitions of cults." In fact, not only Christian denominations but all religions exhibit aspects that at least superficially resemble the defining features of cults. Do cults use controlled hunger to break down the resistance of members? So do Jews on Yom Kippur. Do cults isolate members for indoctrination sessions? Many religions sponsor retreats. Do cult members live together and eschew the outside world? So do monks. Do cults tap their adherents for money? So do televangelists and virtually all congregations. Do cults use mind control? Ah, but isn't it precisely the purpose of all religions to alter the way their adherents perceive the world? Brainwashing would be a more useful description of cults if someone could identify exactly what the word means.

The difference between a cult and a religion, of course, lies in extremity. Cults generally exhibit all seven of the CAN's criteria, while religions generally don't, and cults exhibit them with far greater vigor than religions do. Judaism, for example, demands of its practitioners an occasional day without food; most cults systematically malnourish their members. Still, without identifying an aspect of cults that is not also an aspect of established religious movements, these two classes of organization appear more similar than they really are. The confusion I have described induces a natural concern among religious organizations that a crackdown on cults could presage a crackdown on mainstream religions. As Taylor warns, "'We,' who sometimes wish that the government would restrict the behavior of [cults], may someday become 'them,' the prospective subjects of scrutiny and regulation."

CAN's definition of cults, then, lacks what we might call a red flag—one additional, readily visible criterion that stands beyond such argumentation. I shall propose one—though not, be it understood, in order to define cults as beyond First Amendment protection. The slippery slope that Taylor fears is very real; and the interests of a free society generally—and religious people specifically—are probably best served by toleration of the broadest range of religious beliefs, no matter how vulgar. I offer this refinement, rather, in the interests of intellectual clarity and so that religious organizations don't confuse their constitutional defense of cults with some broader sense of commonality with them. Where this issue concerns the Supreme Court, in other words, it may be useful that a cult should be deemed a religion; nevertheless, it is necessary for us to understand why most Americans, properly, intuit a difference between the Scientologists and the Moonies on the one hand and the Lubavichers on the other.

The quickest way to detect a cult is to sniff for doublethink. The cult seeks control over its membership not by providing a coherent theological system but by providing the opposite: an unstable theology infinitely malleable to the needs of the cult's top echelon and uninterpretable at all times to anyone below that level. Specifically, the cult destabilizes its theology by controlling its religious language—through ambiguity, definitional reversals, and deliberate imprecision. What ultimately separates religions from cults is not that cults seek to control the minds of adherents but that they employ Orwellian doublethink to do so and use the cover of language to effect the far more outrageous means of control set forth by CAN.

The Unification Church's use of the word "Messiah" provides a case in point. Reverend Moon on several occasions has called himself the Messiah, and the Moonie sacred text, *Divine Principle*, declares flatly that the Messiah was born in Korea between the two world wars (Moon was born in 1920). At other times, however, the church hierarchy demurs on the

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question of Moon's divinity. More important, it's not entirely clear what the word Messiah means in the church's vocabulary—the word means different things at different times. Jesus was the Messiah, according to the Moonies, but he failed in his mission to unite the world under a single theocracy, because he didn't marry and have children. Moon, then, represents the Second Coming, though not the Second Coming as described in Revelation. The National Council of Churches (NCC), in a critique of Unification theology, questioned the "meaning and intelligibility" of the Moonie view of the Messiah. While the NCC's first concern was that the teachings were un-Christian, for our purposes the more important critique is their incoherence.

The comparison with Lubavich Hasidism is instructive. Many (though by no means all) Lubavicher Hasidim believed that Menachem Mendel Schneerson was the Messiah. In sharp contrast with the Moonies, however, "Messiah" has the same specific meaning to Lubavichers as it does to all religious Jews. Two thousand years of post-Second Temple Judaism has provided a framework of Jewish messianism, and Lubavichers could define precisely and briefly what they meant when they called Schneerson "King Moshiach." By contrast, when reporter Colin McEnroe last year asked Unification Church spokesman Peter Ross whether Rev. Moon was the Messiah, Ross suggested in effect that the question was unanswerable. "Do you have two days?" he said to McEnroe. When the reporter asked whether Ross could give a summary explanation, Ross told him, "That is the short version."

The Moonies have likewise rendered meaningless a series of words connected to family. The church refers to itself as "the family," and members call each other "brother" and "sister." Moon calls himself and his wife the "true parents." At the same time, the church urges new recruits to cut off contact with their biological families (parents in particular). The purpose, of course, is to appropriate to the church those words people intuitively associate with loyalty, love, and obedience, and to disconnect those words from biological relationships. Yet even as Moon interrupts normal family relations and appropriates the authority of parents, church literature refers to family values, clearly referring not to the church family but to the traditional nuclear family.

The principle vehicle for imposing doublethink is control over language, a dramatic example here being the Church of Scientology, a pseudo-religious cult oriented around the writings of L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard created a dialect that rivals Orwell's Newspeak in its complexity and capacity for indoctrination. As journalist Stewart Lamont writes in *Religion Inc: The Church of Scientology*, "This org-speak is a feature of Scientology in which all terms are defined strictly and processes given technical names by Ron. Like the Red Queen, a word means what Ron says it means." Lamont further explains that this "org-speak is an alphabet soup of initials, jargon, and pseudo-technical expressions. This heightens the impression that a science is being taught and that it is esoteric and unavailable to the bungling ignoramuses in the outside world."

In Scientology courses, students are made to use a Hubbard-written dictionary to look up every unknown word in their texts. The dictionaries, according to Lamont, "define words the Hubbard way." In addition to the technical words, they include English words Hubbard wishes to redefine; he defines "having," for example, as "to be able to touch or permeate or to direct the disposition of." No other reference material is permitted to be used in reading Hubbard's texts. In other words, not only does the church control its source texts, it controls the tools with which the members process them. By its own definition, the Church *has* (directs the disposition of) the English language and thereby *has* its adherents' thoughts.

Political as well as religious cults can be distinguished from legitimate organizations by their use of doublethink. Though political cults espouse extremist ideologies, not extremist theologies, operationally they are virtually identical to religious cults, and they also go to great lengths to control the vocabularies of their members. Dennis King, in his book *Lyndon LaRouche and the New American Fascism*, describes how LaRouche turned his National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC) from a Trotskyite organization into an anti-Semitic neo-fascist group:

> LaRouche helped his followers overcome their moral qualms by reframing reality for them through semantic tricks and false syllogisms.
>
> The resulting belief system involved four layers: a redefinition of "Jew," a redefinition of "Nazi," a denial of the concept of "left" and "right" in politics (to totally disorient the believer); and, for Jewish LaRouchians, a guilt trip and special fears.

According to King, LaRouche distinguished between real and fake Jews, defining the latter as Zionists and practitioners of religious Judaism and calling them "Jews who are not Jews." Real Jews, according to LaRouche, are followers of Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish thinker with no modern following other than the Jews of the LaRouche movement.

LaRouche's redefinition of "Nazi" is even more sinister. Writes King,

> He argued that Hitler was put into power by the Rothschilds and other wealthy Jews-who-are-not-really-Jews. These evil oligarchs invented Nazi racialism and brainwashed the Nazis to accept it. They then urged Hitler and his

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> cronies to persecute the German Jews so the latter would flee to Palestine, where the Rothschilds had decided to set up a zombie state as a tool of their world domination. . . . Thus did *LaRouche place the ultimate blame for Hitler's* crimes on the Jews-who-are-not-Jews-but-really-are-the-Jews-anyway.

In LaRouche literature, the words "Nazi" and "Jew" are both used sometimes pejoratively and sometimes in praise. Moreover, Nazi beliefs and practices are pejoratively called Jewish, and Jewish political practices, both in the U.S. and in Israel, are pejoratively called Nazi.

On the other end of the political spectrum, the New Alliance Party (NAP) plays similar games. The left-wing cult is led by former LaRouche associate Dr. Fred Newman (although the titular leader is Dr. Lenora Fulani, who fronts for the party as its presidential candidate), who considers himself a modern Lenin and writes hardline Marxist political tracts. At the same time, the NAP is not above McCarthyite red-baiting towards its rivals on the left. The party's paper, the *National Alliance*, attacked former NAP member William Pleasant with the banner headline: "William Pleasant's Latest Writings: Communism's Stinking Corpse." In NAP language, the words "left," "Communist," and "Marxist-Leninist" are all positive when applied to the NAP itself, but they are also signals for a priori condemnation when referring to anyone else.

These semantic tricks are not simply oddities of a few isolated cults, but the very source of the cognitive power of cults, the means by which cults concentrate power at the top of the pyramid. Since mainstream religions don't control language, their religious authorities simply can't exercise the degree of power over membership that cult leaders can when they make an active effort to reduce the critical capacities of their adherents. Even religions that have historically concentrated extreme power in the hands of their leadership, the Mormons and the Lubavichers, for example, face a great deal more dissent within their ranks than the mildest of true cults. Without tampering with the definition of "Messiah," those Lubavich leaders who believe that Schneerson was the Messiah have not been able to make their view universally accepted within the movement. Now that the Rebbe is dead, it is an open question whether or not Schneerson's successors (whoever they turn out to be) will bring about such a redefinition. If they do—and the talk within the movement of Schneerson's imminent return might be the stirrings of that redefinition—Lubavich may yet evolve into a cult. In its current form, however, it has a long way to go.

The cult is no more a subset of religion than it is a subset of political party. While some cults orient themselves around ideology and some around theology (and some around self-discovery, and some around psychoanalysis), and they can thus appear to resemble religious or political organizations, cults actually constitute a phenomenon of their own. The free exercise clause protects any organization oriented around a theological worldview. It would be a grave error, however, to conclude that all who come under that protection have anything more in common than the protection itself.

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Mutant Social Growths

K. L. Billingsley

On August 12, 1994, Russian workers were digging the foundation for a new bear cage at the Moscow Zoo when they made an unexpected discovery: a mass grave of skeletons and skulls, some marked with a single bullet hole, the calling card of Stalin's executioners. The cache was one of dozens found in recent years all over the former USSR.

At about the same time, the *Washington Post* carried an article by Daniel Southerland entitled "The Staggering Human Cost of Mao's Vision." Southerland estimates that the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and various man-made calamities such as famine claimed a total of eighty million lives, roughly the population of Mexico. Like Stalin, Mao knew that one death is a tragedy but a million deaths a statistic.

In the summer '94 issue of *Dissent*, Marxist historian Eugene Genovese acknowledged that Marxism-Leninism "broke all records for mass slaughter, piling up tens of millions of corpses in less than three-quarters of a century," and charged that the left knew it from the beginning but remained silent and was therefore guilty of abetting mass murder. Until the left owns up to its mistakes, Genovese argued, it will lack credibility in addressing current social ills.

One province of the left stands in particular need of repentance: the religious left. When the Chinese regime was at the nadir of its brutality, the religious left was hailing it as a bastion of social progress, if not the very Kingdom of God on earth.

"While Liberation turned the whole society towards socialism, the Cultural Revolution deepened and continued that process. Mutant social growths were identified and unceremoniously uprooted. And, the Chinese conclude, there will be more cultural

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revolutions in the future as their society moves along a socialist direction." A quote from a Party publication or a line from one of the regime's tour guides? Actually it comes from *China: People-Questions*, published by the National Council of Churches (NCC) in 1975, while the Great Helmsman was still in power. The book was widely used among member communions during the 1970s and 1980s. The editor was Michael Chinoy, currently the China correspondent of the Cable News Network.

"China's Communist revolution has propelled a backward, poverty-stricken, virtually medieval society into the modern world," wrote Mr. Chinoy in his introduction, adding that starvation had been eliminated and that "serving the people is the dominant social value."

Moreover, Chinoy added, "A violent revolution and bitter civil war were necessary to sweep away the decay, exploitation, and backwardness of old China." Further, "With the Communist victory, the revolutionary process did not stop. Indeed, it was accelerated." But, the editor conceded, problems remained. "The recent Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the present campaign against Confucius indicate that traditional values and attitudes still exist in China, even as the Chinese attempt to eliminate them."

The Reverend Donald MacInnis, former director of the NCC's China program, wrote the chapter on religion. He denied that communism had become the nation's official creed, but a photo of the Great Leader is captioned, "Chairman Mao—his photo and his sayings—replace Confucius in this home altar setting." In short, he writes, "Most Chinese today appear to believe that the new China can move forward very well without religion and that the new values, stressing 'serve the people,' are adequate substitutes for religious disciplines." One gets the feeling that the Reverend MacInnis believed it, too.

The bit about "mutant social growths" being "unceremoniously uprooted" comes from Stuart Dowty, an American automobile worker who had visited China in 1972. "Layoffs and unemployment were no problem," Dowty writes, "because China's planned economy could handle such changes rationally." He refers to Mao's writings, cites various Happy Workers, and concludes: "There is no doubt that socialist motivations, as opposed to individualist perspectives, have produced an impressive record of social and economic growth during the past two decades."

Rhea Whitehead, formerly a member of the NCC's China research staff, opines that "the Chinese believe that the study and application of 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung thought' will provide the basis for change." And so it did, as the death of eighty million attests.

Most of the mass atrocities committed by the Chinese Communist regime were already known when the NCC published its worshipful tract. But the Council has never issued an apology and the religious left in general has never been called to account for its spiritual lend-lease to totalitarian regimes.

But, the reader may protest, 1975 was a long time ago, and a lot of people were saying stupid things then. Yes, but the blindness to the evils of communism on the religious left was persistent, systematic, and unaltered by massive available evidence about the horrors being perpetrated. Does anyone suggest that we impose a moratorium on criticizing those who persisted in praising Hitler?

A little history seems pertinent in view of the fact that the church bureaucracies of the NCC's member communions are again becoming politically active in the form of the Interfaith Alliance, formed to counteract what they perceive as the extremism of the "religious right." Before anyone takes them seriously on the subject of political moderation, they might ask about those happy workers and mutant social growths in China.

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Toward a Post-Apollonian Theology

Peter J. Leithart

One of the central projects of the Enlightenment, as Paul Hazard has put it, was to place the Christian God on trial. Having weighed Him in the balance and found Him wanting, those who remained theists replaced the Triune God of Christian belief with a rational "Supreme Being" stripped of medieval excrescences and worshiped without ceremony through inward piety and the performance of social duty. Here indeed was a god for the Age of Reason: an Apollonian deity exemplifying, in Nietzsche's words, "that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god," not a wild, Dionysian god of music; a god of Euclidian not fractal geometry; a god whose surpassing good taste and proper eighteenth-century self-restraint would prevent him from doing anything that might be considered wrathful; a god who, most importantly, would not dream of interfering with the

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absolute freedom of autonomous man.

This modern theology, and even the dynamics that brought it into being, find a parallel in ancient philosophy. Greek philosophers were so repelled by the scandalous behavior of the gods of mythology that even an unknowable "Supreme Being" was preferable. Aristotle argued for the logical necessity of positing an unmoved something behind the movement of the universe, and called that something "god." It was incredible that such an exalted being should occupy itself with the messy realities of earth; the only activity worthy of such a god is "a thinking on thinking." Given these assumptions, it is hardly an occasion of wonder that, despite some hesitations, when all was said and done Aristotle concluded that friendship between God and man is impossible.

What is shocking is that so many Christian theologians have attempted to construct Christian theology in an Apollonian mode. Aquinas concluded his argument from causation, itself derived from Aristotle, by stating that the first cause is that "which all men call God." Frederick Copleston was right, however, to suggest that Aquinas' identification of the first cause with a personal God appears to be "cavalier," and to question whether Aquinas' arguments "give us a personal Being at all." Modern theologians, as Michael J. Buckley has shown in great detail, responded to Enlightenment atheism by seeking to prove the existence of a "providential *numen* or a great architect," hoping that Christian theology might be "justified without Christ." In short, "Christianity, in order to defend its God, transmuted itself into theism." Apollonian theology has so infected Christian thinking that it seems almost blasphemous to read James Barr's assertion that in important ways the God of Scripture has less in common with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover than with Zeus.

Willingness to adapt Christianity to Greek and modern philosophical theism has been an enormous loss to Christian thought and life. Two aspects of this tragedy can be briefly noted. First, conceptualizing God in philosophical terms as "unmoved mover," "first cause," or "ground of being" involves a radical depersonalization of God that can be seen especially by examining the fate of the dogma of the Trinity. Enlightenment philosophes aimed some of their most destructive weapons at this allegedly irrational doctrine, and Christian theologians, accommodating as always, agreed not to bring it up. Yet it is difficult to see how any theology but a Trinitarian one seriously affirms the personal nature of God. Personality, despite many shades of definition, is almost universally defined in terms of a capacity to relate to others. If God is an eternal Person, He must be in some eternal relation. A strict monotheism—God is one and only one—leaves unanswered the question, with whom or what does He have an eternal relation?

Several answers suggest themselves. It might be said that God has a capacity for relation that remained unfulfilled until He created the world, but this suggestion makes the fulfillment of God's capacity for personal relation dependent on the creation. Alternatively, one could answer that God has an eternal relation to the creation, but this means that the creation is eternal and not, in fact, a creation at all—which further implies that God is more Demiurge than Creator. A more promising alternative is to recognize a multiplicity of persons in God, whose eternal personality is expressed in loving relations with One Another. Only Trinitarian theology consistently maintains that ultimate reality is a matter of Persons-in-Relation, an affirmation fraught with enormous philosophical and political implications. Hesitancy to confess the reality of *this* God has caused an incalculable impoverishment of the Church's witness—quite a price to pay to secure a respectful hearing in the salon.

Second, the theology of ancient Greece and the modern West leads to serious distortions of the scriptural revelation of God's character. Approached by a reader operating on Apollonian assumptions, the Bible—riddled as it is with descriptions of God's wrath and jealousy, His joy and regret, His love and hate, His constant miraculous meddling with the creation—becomes hugely problematic. Faced with the data of revelation, an Apollonian, if he accepts the Bible at all, must characterize biblical descriptions of God as "accommodations" designed to make it possible for finite, temporal creatures to apprehend an infinite and eternal God.

Useful as the theory of accommodation is in an orthodox setting, questions and dangers lurk for the unwary. On the one hand, one could say that while biblical descriptions of God are anthropomorphic, they reveal something true about the nature of God. This answer does not help the Apollonian, since it merely moves the question back a step without answering it. One still has to deal with a God who expresses wrath, though not in a human way. On the other hand, biblical language could be understood as "sheer accommodation," language that is not in any strong sense a real description of the unknowable nature of God. In this case, the Bible is at worst deceptive and at best hardly worthy to be considered "revelation." The only way out of this cul-de-sac is to admit that the God revealed in Scripture is not the detached, disinterested, Apollonian deity of philosophy. It is interesting in this regard that a character in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales* concluded, from an imaginative survey of Jewish feasts and Sabbaths, their propensity for wine and avoidance of honey, that the God of the Jews was not Apollo, but Dionysus.

Of course, the God revealed in Scripture is neither Apollo nor Dionysus. He is Yahweh, the Creator and Lord of all things, who has revealed Himself in the

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New Testament as Father, Son, and Spirit. Still, the biblical revelation of God includes what Nietzsche might have called a marked Dionysian strain. A truly biblical theology will recognize and embrace what Walter Bruggemann has called the "wild, dangerous, unfettered, and free" character of the Living God. A truly biblical theology honors the God who is, in Jeremiah's words, a "dread champion," and a husband willing to lay down His life out of love for His bride. A truly biblical theology is concerned with the God whose heart, as the book of Judges tells us, is gladdened by wine.

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On The Other Hand

Cherchez la Femme, or, The Nanny's Revenge

Peter L. Berger

Some of us have hardly gotten over the shock of Harold Bloom's discovery that a good portion of the Pentateuch was written by a woman (Ms. J., as I recall), and now we have to face yet another staggering blow to our phallocratic smugness.

I'm referring to John Fuegi's recent biography of Bertolt Brecht. If Fuegi is to be believed, much of Brecht's opus was in fact written by a long series of mistresses whose work he shamelessly appropriated and passed off as his own. Thus even *The Three-Penny Opera*, which launched Brecht's worldwide fame, was (or so Fuegi claims) written for the most part by one Elisabeth Hauptmann. Brecht's own contribution to this great success story seems to have been as a sort of editor, and he did choose Kurt Weill as the composer. (Fuegi does *not* claim that the music was actually written by Lotte Lenya, the singer whose raunchy voice helped to make the work's triumph, and who was Weill's wife and may or may not have been one of Brecht's innumerable mistresses.)

This is all very encouraging, because it suggests a solution to a serious problem faced by those who wish to revise the canon so as to give adequate representation to the cultural contributions of women. It happens that, in a fair number of intellectual and artistic fields, there is such a paucity of plausible female candidates for canonization that even the most imaginatively constructed quota system fails to produce the desired representation. Now, I'm not for a moment suggesting that Bloom or Fuegi have been motivated by this sort of affirmative action thinking; their feminist credentials are, in any case, doubtful or nonexistent. But they have certainly given me an idea and, as I will point out in a moment, others seem to have had the same idea too: What if one could show that, in fact, many allegedly male creations were in fact stolen from the women who were the original authors? A whole new ballgame!

For the record, let me state that I do not necessarily approve of such an undertaking. I fail to be persuaded by both the traditional and the feminist explanations of the underrepresentation of women among the classics of most disciplines. The traditional explanation that women are congenitally incapable of intellectual or artistic achievement is as false as the feminist explanation that, though fully capable, they have been kept from achieving by their male oppressors. I believe, on the contrary, that women are congenitally superior to men and that they have proved it by being *otherwise occupied.* Specifically, they were occupied in raising children and thus building civilization, and in order to be able to do this they convinced their silly mates to write books, make war, or do just about anything as long as it got them out of the house.

That, however, is another story. For the moment, I'm satisfied that the aforementioned idea may launch a thousand ships of feminist scholarship—and ipso facto keep these ladies so busy that they will stay out of any field that may be relevant to my own work.

As readers of First Things know, I keep a foot in the feminist camp by my (let us say) association with Aglaia Holt, the distinguished Professor of Wymyns Studies at California State University at Poco. (I have been criticized for this by my conservative friends, who call it fraternizing with the enemy, but I'm mindful of the highly conservative wisdom observed by every Chinese family to the effect that one should have contacts in all camps, because one never knows.) On my recent visit to Poco I mentioned my idea to Aglaia. She broke out in her notorious Homeric laughter (pardon, *Bacchic* laughter), which is almost as raunchy as Lenya's, and said: "My dear friend, you have just verified this idea by having it in the first place. Don't think that we've been waiting for you guys to come up with this!" She then told me the following, which I am passing on, in strictest confidence, to readers of this journal.

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It seems that the National Endowment for Feminine Huwymynities has initiated the Rainbow Canon Project (RCP). Its purpose is to go over all the humanities [sic], discipline by discipline, and revise their respective canons by including the appropriate texts or works of art by women, gays and lesbians, racial minorities, and persons with handicaps. RCP operates through a number of specialized task forces. Some have it easier than others. English literature, for example, has a more than respectable number of female and/or homosexual authors, the contributions to music by nonwhites are not hard to enumerate, and there is no problem with the visual arts if madness is included in the category of handicap (as indeed it has been). Aglaia, never one to shy away from a challenging opportunity, has joined the task force on philosophy. It is there that the idea I falsely (and phallocratically) proposed to her as my own has been most useful.

The task force, needless to say, has given a prominent place in the new philosophy canon to a number of already well-known authors in that field, such as Hannah Arendt, Suzanne Langer, and Simone de Beauvoir (the last deserving her place even if one leaves aside the well-founded suspicion that she wrote the better part of Jean-Paul Sartre's books). But Aglaia and her colleagues have not stopped there. Indefatigably they have burrowed into the underside of all the great male philosophers, and they have come up with some truly astounding hypotheses (or, as they would prefer to say, subtextual disclosures). A woman who teaches classics at Our Lady of Perpetual Outrage A&M in North Dakota has published a monograph arguing that Xantippe, the much-maligned wife of Socrates, actually had most of the ideas that chauvinist Plato ascribed to her husband. Another publication proposes that Thomas Aquinas plagiarized heavily from the recently discovered opus of one Sister Placida, a Benedictine nun who was the sister of Thomas' favorite maiden aunt. An entire subcommittee is working feverishly on Hegel. But I'm most impressed by what Aglaia told me about the job being done on Kant. (As she put it: "This gives a whole new meaning to neo-Kantianism!")

It seems that the RCP task force has made contact with the Feminist Philosophy Collective at the University of Heidelberg. A leading member of this highly productive team, Professor Dr. Ursula Hartmund, has just written a hard-hitting (*nomen semper est omen*, or, if not *semper*, frequently) scholarly article entitled "*Warum war Kant immer so puenktlich?*" ("Why was Kant always so punctual?"), published in the quarterly *Feministische Philosophie und andere Weibergeschichten*, 1993:3. Hartmund was referring, of course, to Kant's well-known orderly habits, which allowed the citizens of Koenigsberg to set their watches by his daily walks to and from the university. Kant's monomaniacal orderliness appears to have been inculcated in him early by his nanny, one Katarina Kowalski, called by him Trina and by his family "*die dumme Drine*" ("stupid Drine," a pejorative term applied to women of Polish ethnicity in those benighted regions of eastern Germany).

Well, it turns out that Katarina/Trina/Drine was anything but *dumm*. She lived to a ripe old age on a pension paid to her by Kant himself, not generously but out of malevolent calculation. According to a contemporary source, Katarina was also a writer of obscure tracts combining ideas later ascribed to Kant with Swedenborgianism. Unfortunately, none of these writings has survived, though Kant's hostility to Swedenborg is well documented. But Hartmund does not rely exclusively on this particular source. In a brilliant deconstructionist analysis of the *Critique of Practical Reason* she shows that Kant's text is full of idiosyncratic formulations best explained as coming from someone who spoke and wrote German with a Polish accent. She concludes by hypothesizing (a subtextual disclosure indeed) that Kant's overpunctual peregrinations through the streets of Koenigsberg were dictated by Katarina's peculiar lifestyle. Every day, before he went to the university and then before he went home, he revisited Katarina during the two short periods in her daily schedule when she was not engaged in Swedenborgian mystical exercises. Thanks to Hartmund, we now know what he did during these visits.

I conclude with the final words of Hartmund's article: "Worse than men's exploitation of female sexuality and labor has always been their exploitation of the female mind." *Natuerlich*!

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The Inhuman Use of Human Beings

A Statement on Embryo Research by the Ramsey Colloquium

A panel of nineteen experts appointed by the National Institutes of Health has recommended government funding for conceiving human embryos in the laboratory for the sole purpose of using them as materials for research. After carefully studying the Report of the Human Embryo Research Panel, we conclude that this recommendation is morally repugnant, entails grave injustice to innocent human beings, and constitutes an assault upon the foundational ideas of human dignity and rights essential to a free and decent society. The arguments offered by the Panel are more ideological and self-interested than scientific; the actions recommended by the Panel cross the threshold into a world of apparently limitless technological manipulation and manufacture of human life. The Panel claims to draw a "clear line" against experiments that almost everyone would deem abhorrent. In fact it does not draw such a line and, by virtue of its own logic, it cannot draw such a line. The recommendation, if adopted, will be a fateful step for humanity from which it may be impossible to turn back.

All of us have a stake in the questions raised. In a society such as ours, these questions cannot be, they must not be, decided by a committee of experts. We urge a comprehensive public debate and intense congressional scrutiny regarding the proposals emanating from the NIH. The research recommended by the Panel should not be funded by the government. It should not be done at all. It should be prohibited by law. In what follows we attempt to explain how we have reached this conclusion.

We are confident that most people, to the extent that they are aware of the Panel's recommendation, experience an immediate and strong revulsion. This is not to be dismissed as an irrational reaction. It signals a deep, intuitive awareness of lines that must not be crossed if we are to maintain our sometimes fragile hold upon our own humanity.

For instance, the *Washington Post*'s editorial response to the Panel's proposal declared flatly that "The creation of human embryos specifically for research that will destroy them is unconscionable." The acids of moral relativism have not advanced so far in our culture as to destroy completely the capacity to know and say that *some things are simply not to be countenanced*, much less approved and funded by the government. The editorial goes on to distinguish the present question from that of abortion. "To suggest that support for abortion rights equals support for such [embryo] experimentation is to buy abortion opponents' view that permitting abortion means erasing society's ability to make distinctions." The question of creating, using, and destroying human embryos cannot be separated entirely from the question of abortion, but the two questions can and should be distinguished. We hope that most people, whatever their views on the legalization of abortion, will be moved to take a stand at this new line that must not be crossed.

The ominously new thing in the Panel's Report is that embryonic human life should be treated simply as research material to be used and discarded—and should even be brought into being solely for that purpose. The Report readily acknowledges that the embryos to be used are instances of human life. It does not hesitate to answer the question of when a new human life begins. Indeed, indisputable scientific evidence leaves no choice: a new human life begins at conception (or, as the Report usually prefers, "fertilization"). The Report speaks of the embryo from the earliest moment as "developing human life." We are at various points told that the very early embryo deserves "serious moral consideration," "moral respect," "profound respect," and "some added measure of respect beyond that accorded animal subjects."

Honesty requires that we speak not simply of human life but of a human being. Skin and intestinal tissue, even eggs and sperm, are human life. But,

THE RAMSEY COLLOQUIUM, *which is sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, is a group of Jewish and Christian theologians, philosophers, and scholars that meets periodically to consider questions of ethics, religion, and public life. It is named after Paul Ramsey (1913-1988), the distinguished ethicist.*

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unlike such instances of human life, the embryo from the earliest moment has the active capacity to articulate itself into what everyone acknowledges is a human being. The embryo is a being; that is to say, it is an integral whole with actual existence. The being is human; it will not articulate itself into some other kind of animal. Any being that is human is a human being. If it is objected that, at five days or fifteen days, the embryo does not look like a human being, it must be pointed out that this is precisely what a human being looks like—and what each of us looked like—at five or fifteen days of development. Clarity of language is essential to clarity of thought.

The question is whether the government should permit and fund the production of human beings—completely innocent and powerless human beings—to be used as material for scientific research. After answering that question in the affirmative, the Report then considers which human beings can be so used and which cannot. It is one of the most treasured maxims of our civilization that human beings are always to be treated as ends and never merely as means. In a partial dissent from the Report, Professor Patricia A. King, a member of the Panel, writes, "The fertilization of human oocytes [female eggs] for research purposes is unnerving because human life is being created solely for human *use*. I do not believe that this society has developed the conceptual frameworks necessary to guide us down this slope. . . . At the very least, we should proceed with extreme caution." The conclusion that properly follows from her fully justified anxiety is that we should proceed not at all. Regrettably, the other members of the Panel appear not to have shared even the anxiety.

In weighing the question of which human beings can be used as a means to the ends of scientific progress and which cannot, the Report says the decision must rest on a "multi-factorial" judgment. By this is meant that no one principle or line of reasoning will support the conclusion that the Panel reaches. The Report's use of "multi-factorial" judgment is tantamount to suggesting that an accumulation of doubtful arguments will produce a convincing conclusion. In the course of reaching its "multi-factorial" judgment, the Panel entangles itself in philosophical, moral, and even scientific confusions. We are sorry to report that, in some of its arguments, the Panel invites the charge of being more than a little disingenuous.

In order to decide which human embryos are usable and which are "protectable" from such use, the Report leans very heavily on the concept of "personhood." The question is switched from "When does the life of a human being begin?" to "When does a human being become a person?" Persons are protectable; nonpersons or those who are deemed to be something less than persons are not protectable. But the only reason they are not protectable is that they will not be protected. Although they are obviously protectable in the sense that we are capable of protecting them, they are designated "not protectable" because we have decided not to protect them. And we decide not to protect them because they are not persons. Whether they are persons, and therefore protectable, depends upon their possessing certain qualities that we associate with persons and think worth protecting. Here and elsewhere in the Report, the reader is struck by a large measure of circularity in the Panel's reasoning.

The question is not whether the embryo is protectable but whether it is in need of protection. The Report says that "the commencement of protectability is not an all or nothing matter, but results from a being's increasing possession of qualities that make respecting it (and hence limiting others' liberty in relation to it) more compelling." In other words, moral standing develops as the human being develops, and "personhood" is an award we bestow for performance. The principle espoused by the Report leads to the suggestion that our obligation to afford protection to a human being is in inverse proportion to his or her need for protection. Put differently, those who are fully and undoubtedly persons are protectable because they are, by and large, able to protect themselves.

It is not traditional in ethical discourse to discuss what "life" or "forms of life" or "developing forms of life" are entitled to respect and protection. Living human beings are so entitled. The classical conviction of our culture has been that, contrary to the Report, it is "an all or nothing matter." We are implicated in the fate of all; every human being is inviolable. It has taken society much blood and struggle to overcome what Professor King calls the "conceptual frameworks" whereby the powerful justified excluding various categories of the powerless from moral parity. The Panel's use of "personhood" is such a conceptual framework, and it applies to both the born and unborn.

The concept of personhood has a complicated history in theology, philosophy, and law. Personhood is certainly not a scientific concept. As used by the Panel, it is an ideological concept, an idea in the service of a program aimed at changing dramatically our civilization's understanding of human life and community. In this Report, personhood is a status that we bestow. We who have received that status decide who will be admitted to, and who will be excluded from, the circle of those who are recognized as persons and are therefore entitled to respect and protection. We are told that protectability increases with an "increasing possession of qualities" that we find compelling. It follows that protectability decreases with the decreasing possession of such qualities.

From their writings and public statements, we know that some members of the Panel do not flinch

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from the ominous implications of that principle for those who have lost their "compelling" qualities, especially at the end of the life spectrum. As a more complete explanation of its ethical reasoning, the Report cites an article by Professor Ronald Green, himself a member of the Panel, "Toward a Copernican Revolution in Our Thinking About Life's Beginning and Life's End." It is indeed a revolution that is proposed by Professor Green and by the Human Embryo Research Panel. The cited article asserts that there are no "qualities existing *out there*" in any human being requiring us to respect him or her as a person. Whether to grant or deny "personhood" (and hence the right not to be harmed or killed) is, we are told, "the outcome of a very active and complex process of decision on our part." In the current language of the academy, personhood is entirely a "social construct." Whether someone is too young or too old, too retarded or too sick, too troublesome or too useless to be entitled to personhood is determined by a "decision on our part." The American people have not been consulted about, and certainly have not consented to, this "Copernican Revolution" in our understanding of human dignity and human rights.

The revolution is necessary, however, in order to license, morally and legally, the research that the Panel recommends. The "conceptual frameworks" of the Report's extended ethical and philosophical reflection obscure rather than illumine the questions at hand. As already indicated, the question is not the difference between human beings who are persons and those who allegedly are not but the difference between human beings and other animals. Similarly, the Report makes much of the "preimplantation embryo" (implantation in the womb usually begins with the sixth day and is completed by the fourteenth day after conception). A "greater measure of respect" is due the embryo after the fourteenth day, says the Panel. This is gravely misleading. In question are not preimplantation embryos but *unimplanted* embryos—embryos produced with the intention that they will *not* be implanted and can therefore be kept alive and experimented upon as long as they are scientifically useful.

There are additional obfuscations. The Report makes much of the "twinning" factor. An early embryo is said not to be "individuated" because in a very small minority of cases the embryo may "twin" into two or more human beings. The ethical significance of this possibility is elusive. The fact that in rare instances an embryo may divide is no justification whatever for deliberately producing human embryos for the purpose of experimentation that will destroy them. Moreover, the Report repeatedly points to the "potential" of the embryo for further development as an indicator of whether or not it is "protectable." Here the circularity of reasoning is particularly blatant: A human being is not protectable in the early stages of development because, the Report claims, it has no potential for further development. But in the case of the embryo produced in the laboratory it has no potential for further development for the sole reason that researchers will not protect it. Because they wish to use it, they do not protect it; because they do not protect it, its natural potential for development is destroyed; because it thus "has no potential," it is declared "not protectable."

The monumental questions raised by this Report —Who shall live and who shall die? Who belongs to the community of the commonly protected? How do we distinguish between human beings and laboratory animals?—demand much more serious thinking than is offered by the Human Embryo Research Panel.

The Panel claims to have established clear lines and clear time limits regarding what it is permissible to do with human embryos. That claim is false, and it seems that the panelists know that it is false. The Report says that research with these living human beings "should not be permitted beyond the time of the usual appearance of the primitive streak in vivo (14 days)." (The primitive streak is a groove that develops along the midline of the embryonic disc and its appearance is viewed as one of several milestones in the embryo's continuous development.) But this time limit is clearly arbitrary and chosen as a pragmatic compromise, as the transcript of the Panel's deliberations makes clear.

The panelists all know that development is continuous and it offers no such bright natural line to those who would "ascribe personhood." Moreover, this "time limit" is by no means firm, as is evident in the Report's assertion that it should serve "at the present time," and "for the foreseeable future." Some technically possible and scientifically interesting experiments "warrant additional review," while others are deemed "unacceptable for federal funding" because the desired experiments can at present be done with laboratory animals and because of "concern for public sensitivities on highly controversial research proposals." At the present time. For the foreseeable future.

For example, producing genetically identical individuals to be born at different times, freezing an embryonic human being who is genetically identical to a born child in order to serve as a later source for organ and tissue transplantation, cloning an existing human being, and making "carbon copies" of an existing embryo—these and other projects are declared to be "inappropriate." It is not clear that the Report opposes the doing of these things; it simply does not recommend, at present, federal funding for doing them. But in the logic of the Report, there is no reason *in principle* why these things should not be done or why they should not be funded by the government.

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"Throughout its deliberations," we are told, "the Panel relied on the principle that research involving preimplantation embryos is acceptable public policy only if the research promises significant scientific and therapeutic benefits." But a principle that says something should not be done unless there are strong motives for doing it is no principle at all. The claim to have set limits is vitiated by the repeated assertion that exceptions can be made for "serious and compelling reasons." The "Copernican Revolution" is nothing less than the abandonment of any and all principled limits. If it is for "serious and compelling reasons," scientists can do whatever they decide to do with human beings who are declared to be "unprotectable." And they can get government funding for doing it, within the limits of "public sensitivities." There is no reason, in principle, why such license would be confined to very small and very young human beings.

Of course the Panel believes that its recommendations are supported by "serious and compelling reasons" having to do with gains in scientific knowledge and therapeutic benefits. We do not doubt that lethal experiments on powerless and unconsenting human beings might result in findings of scientific interest. As for therapeutic benefits, the Report holds out the promise of improved success with in vitro fertilization, new contraceptive techniques, new prospects for genetic screening, the production of cell lines for use in tissue transplantation, and, more vaguely, treatment of cancer and other diseases.

In fact, the Report seems too reticent in its discussion of possible "benefits" from the research it proposes. In a time when the entire human genome is being mapped, when the age is rising at which many women first become mothers, when, consequently, there is increased anxiety about the risk of genetic diseases, when harvesting parts from the embryo and fetus may have therapeutic uses for older human beings, when care for the handicapped and defective is viewed by many as excessively burdensome, and when it seems technically possible to produce custom-made babies—in such a time it is not surprising that people might be tempted to agree that the Panel's recommendations are supported by "serious and compelling reasons." The Report explicitly encourages funding for "preimplantation genetic screening," and the laboratory testing of artificially fertilized embryos before they are placed in the womb. The normalizing of in vitro fertilization and the universalizing of genetic screening in order to eliminate the unfit and advance eugenic goals are part of a "brave new world" clearly advanced by the proposals of the Human Embryo Research Panel.

Is this the future that we want? Who should decide? That brings us to the makeup and role of the Panel itself.

"Americans hold widely different views on the question of the moral value of prenatal life at its various stages," the Report notes. "It is not the role of those who help form public policy to decide which of these views is correct. Instead, public policy represents an effort to arrive at a reasonable accommodation to diverse interests." The Panel says it eschews the task of adopting a particular philosophy or settling arguments that it describes as "metaphysically complex and controverted." In fact, however, in order to legitimate morally what it recommends, the Panel does adopt a particular philosophy that it believes cuts through the complexities and controversies. That philosophy is ordinarily called utilitarianism. It is a primitive and unreflective version of utilitarianism, to be sure, but the message is unequivocal: the end justifies the means. If there are "serious and compelling reasons," it would seem that the end would justify any means. Certainly it justifies producing, using, and destroying human beings who are valued only for their utility as tools serving the purposes of scientific research. The Panel's is not a "multi-factorial" judgment. There is ultimately only one factor: scientific utility.

While claiming not to impose a moral judgment or philosophy, the Panel imposes a moral judgment and philosophy. At the same time, while apparently only offering advice to the NIH, the Panel has in effect arrogated to itself the work of our elected representatives. It is the task of politicians and legislatures "to arrive at a reasonable accommodation to diverse interests." A panel of experts might inform political deliberation by displaying the full range of facts, arguments, and considerations that legislators should take into account in making decisions. This Panel could not do that, however. While the Panel heard testimony from those who do not share its crassly utilitarian philosophy, such diversity was not included in the Panel itself. As explained by the chairman at the Panel's first meeting, it was thought inappropriate to include any members who oppose the research in question. Thus the Panel was able to arrive at a "reasonable accommodation" of the "widely different views" on the questions at hand by conveniently eliminating different views.

Additionally troubling is the fact that members of the Panel are themselves doing the very research for which they are recommending federal funding. An ethics advisory panel certainly must take testimony from scientists involved in the research under consideration. In this case, however, it would seem that members of an advisory panel are recommending federal grants for their own work. This is ordinarily not called advising but lobbying. Congress should examine closely the apparent conflict of interest involved.

Our concern is with the philosophy and moral reasoning embraced by the Panel. Our conviction—and, we are confident, the conviction of almost all Ameri-

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cans—is that the ominous questions engaged must not be decided by one-sided committees of the National Institutes of Health. What affects all should, through our representative process, be decided by all. The proposal that some human beings should be declared "not protectable" affects all of us. The proposal that human beings should be treated merely as means rather than ends is revolutionary, but it is not new. Such "conceptual frameworks" have a terrifying history, not least in this bloodiest of centuries.

The production of human beings for the purpose of experiments that will destroy them should be prohibited by law. The use of human beings for experiments that will do them harm and to which they have not given their consent should be prohibited by law. It matters not how young or how small, how old or how powerless, such human beings may be. Some nations ban or severely restrict the research proposed by the Panel (e.g., Norway, Germany, Austria, Australia). In the shadow of the unspeakable horror of Nazism, the Nuremberg Code declared, "No experiment should be conducted where there is an a priori reason to believe that death or disabling injury will occur." And the 1975 Helsinki Declaration of the World Medical Association affirms, "Concern for the interests of the subject must always prevail over the interest of science and society."

It is objected that a ban would not be enforceable. If so, how can anyone believe that the proposed regulation by NIH would be enforceable? The research recommended by the Panel is now being done under various auspices, with or without government funding. Driven by scientific curiosity and hubris, reinforced by the prospect of great commercial gain and a belief that it will produce benefits for society, such research probably cannot be stopped altogether. But the necessity of a law does not depend on its being universally effective. What must be made illegal and declared morally odious is any research that subjects human beings to scientific experimentation that will certainly result in their grave injury or death.

The shamelessly partisan and conceptually confused Report of the Human Embryo Research Panel should be unambiguously rejected. Limits that are "for the present time" and "for the foreseeable future" limit nothing. They are but unconvincing reassurances that scientists are going carefully where they should not be permitted to go at all. If the course recommended by the Panel is approved, the foreseeable future is ominously clear: it is a return to the past when people contrived "conceptual frameworks" for excluding categories of human beings, born and unborn, from our common humanity. FT

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The Giving Tree: A Symposium

Shel Silverstein's The Giving Tree *is something of a classic of modern children's literature. But it is also highly controversial. Its appropriateness for children recently became the subject of lively discussion among the members of the Symposium on "The Ethics of Everyday Life," which is sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Public Life with the support of the Lilly Endowment. We are pleased to offer our readers the text of* The Giving Tree *(reprinted by permission of HarperCollins) and the varied responses to the text by members of the Symposium.*

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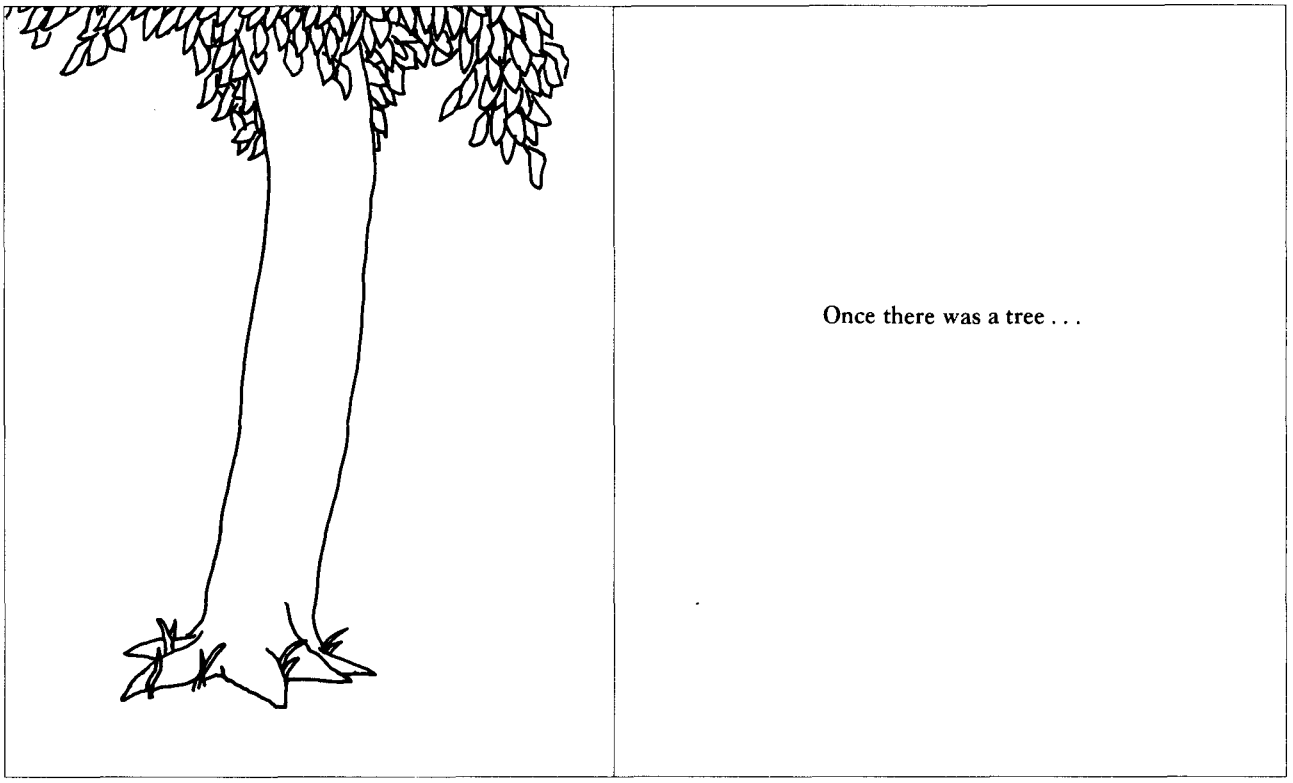

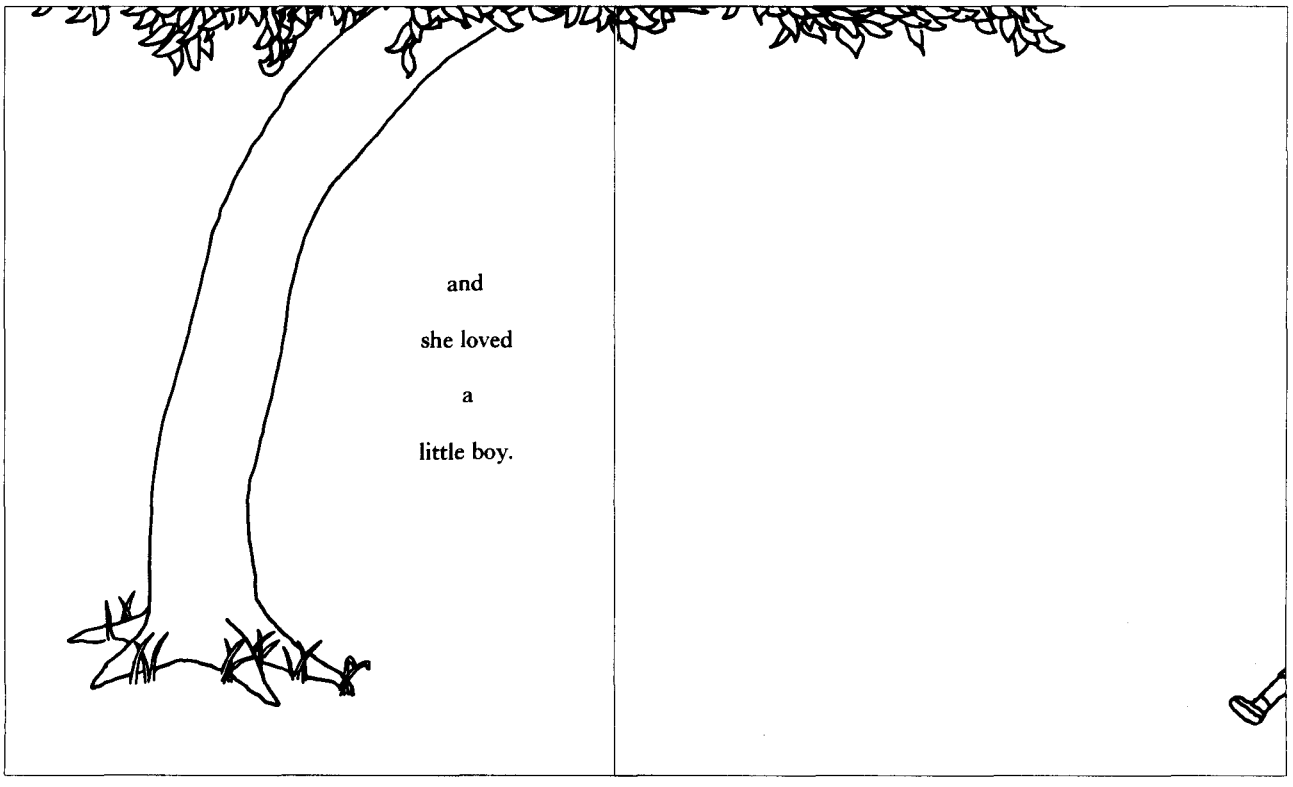

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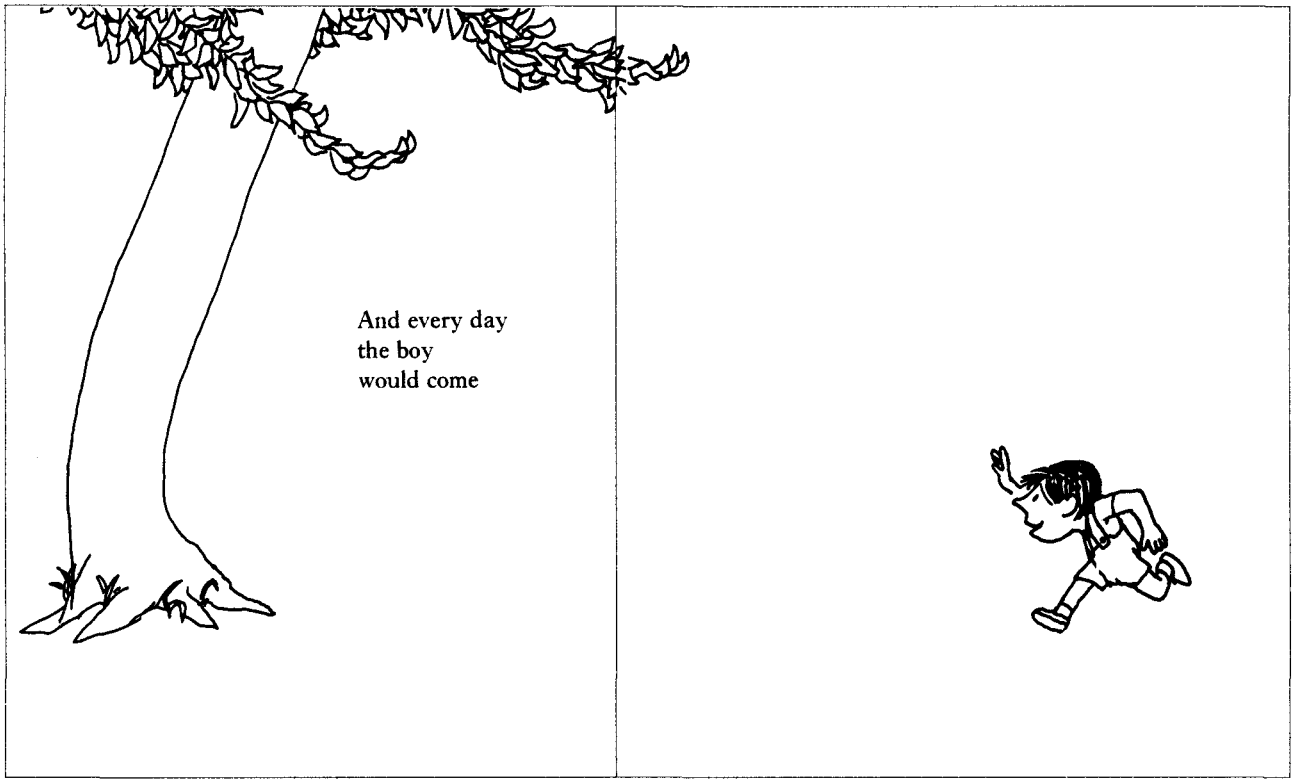

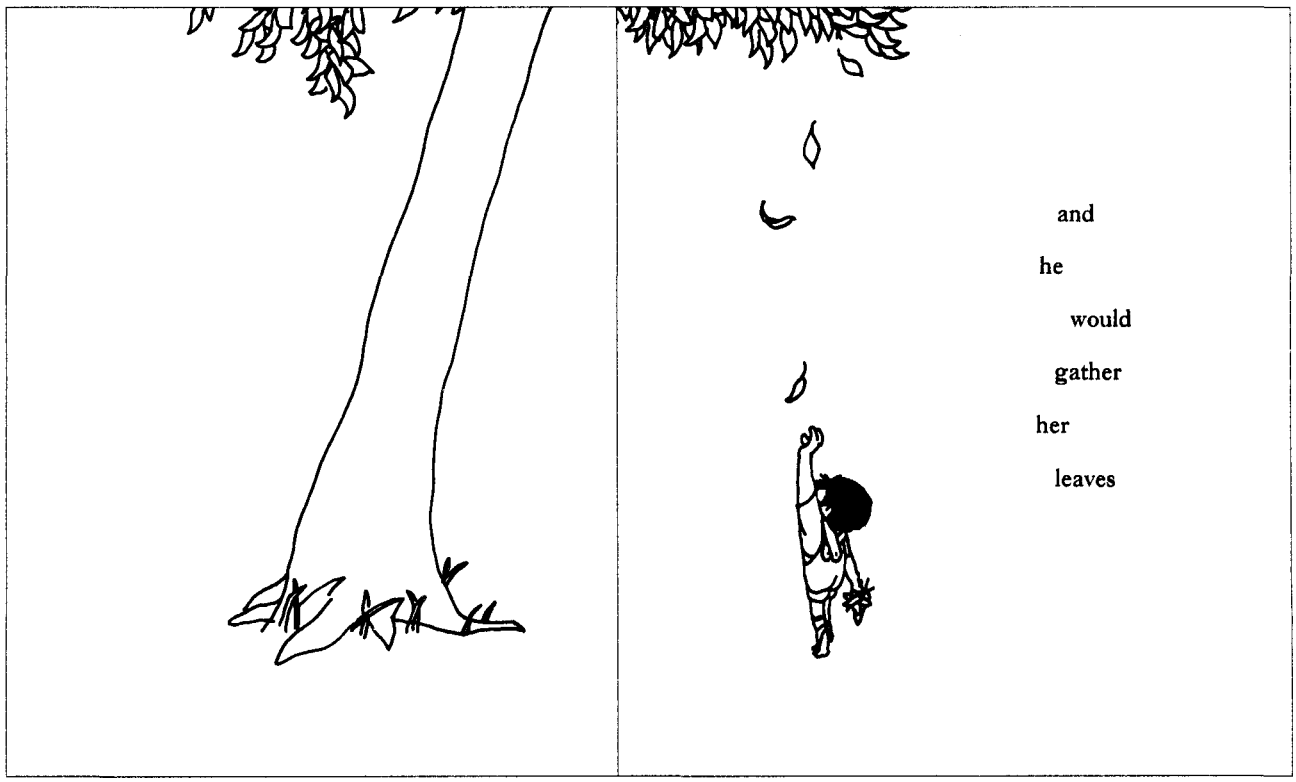

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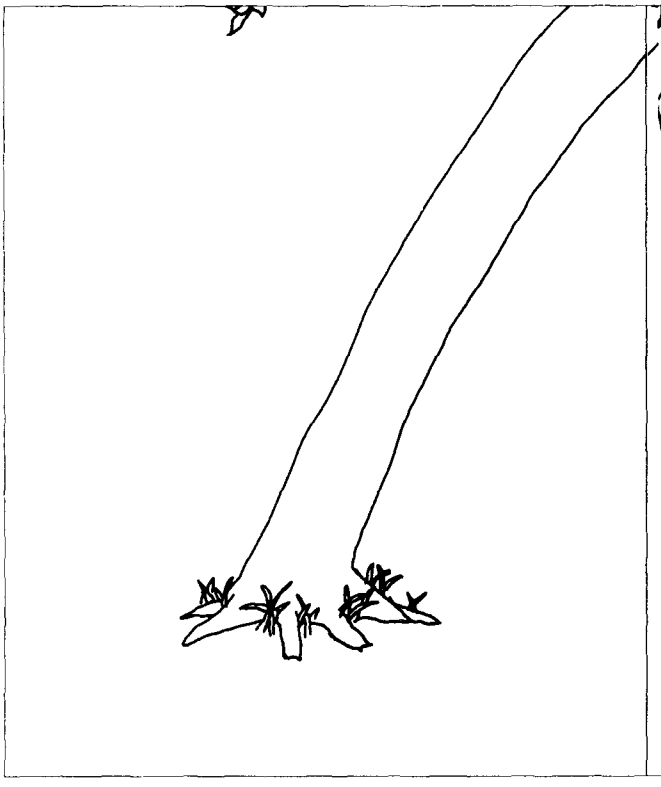
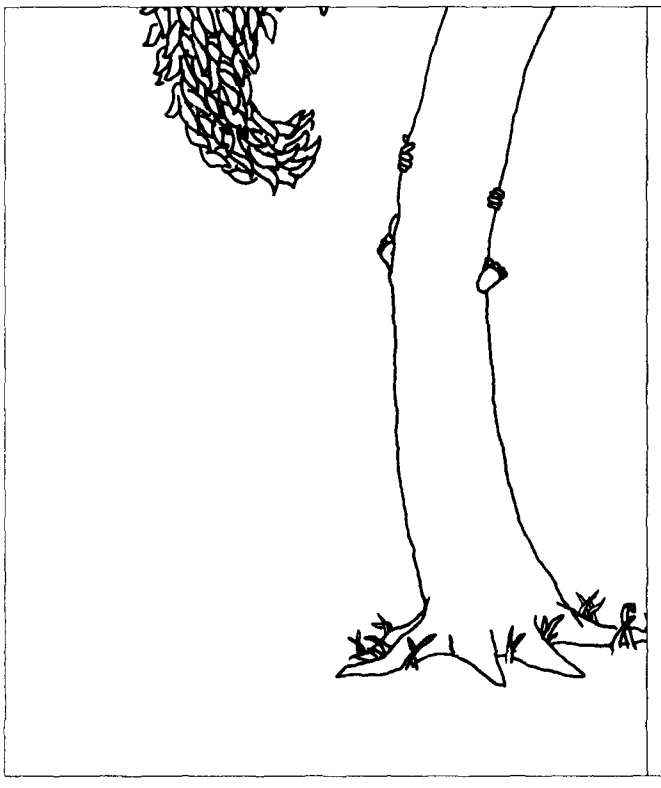


and make them
into crowns
and play king of the forest.



He would climb up her trunk

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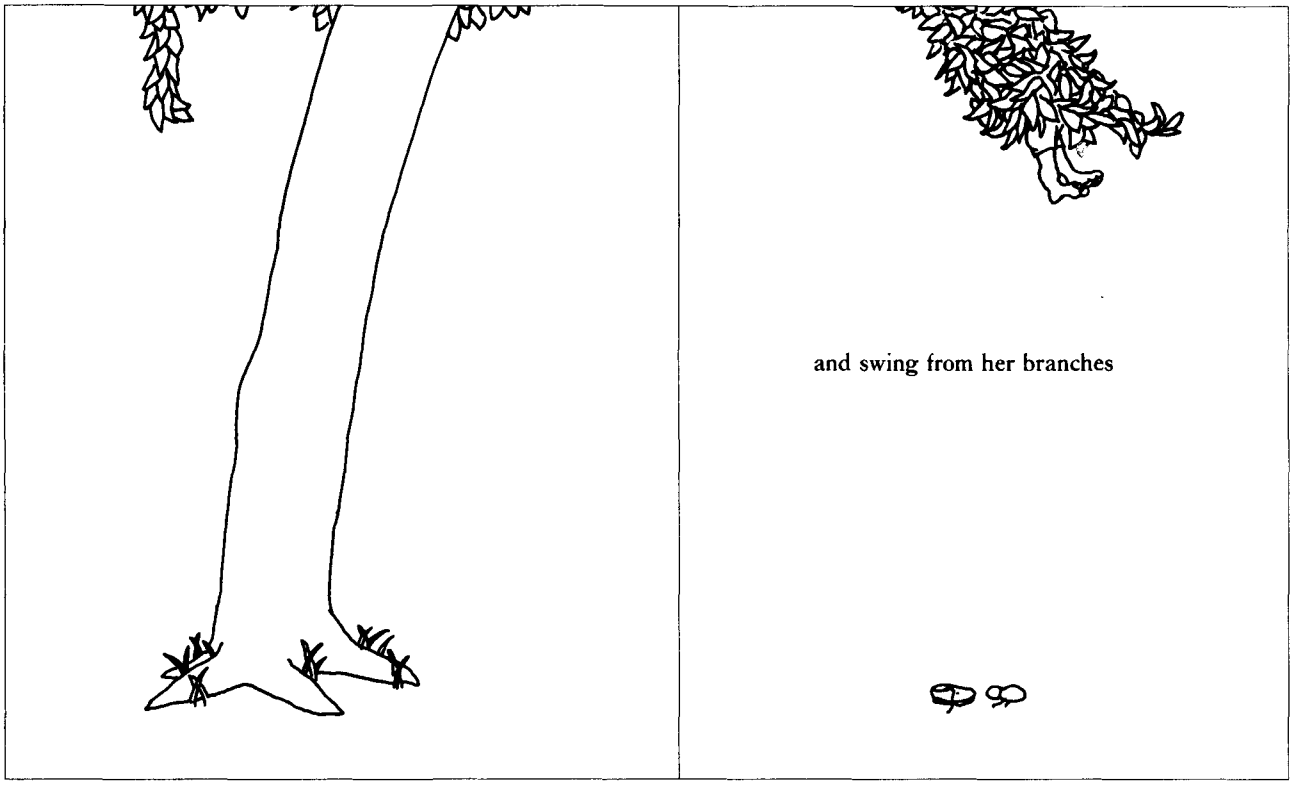

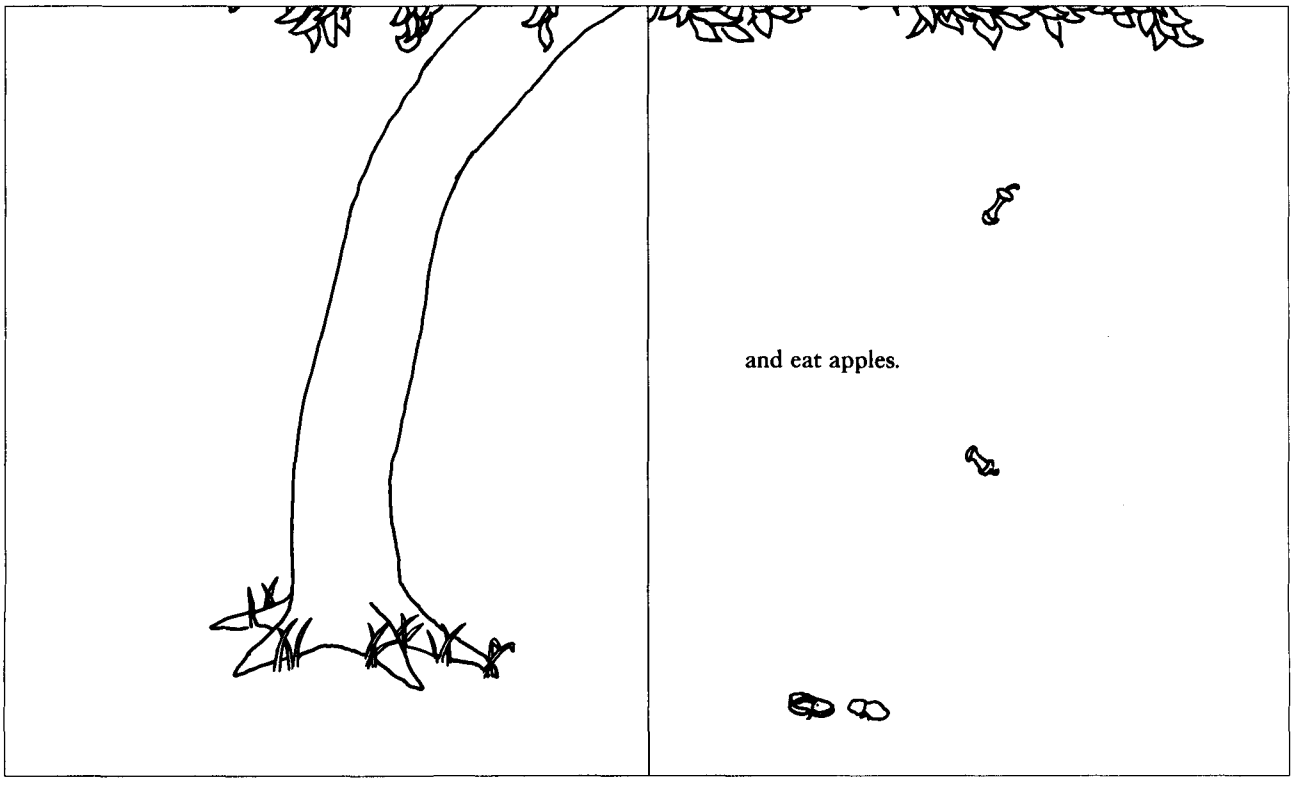

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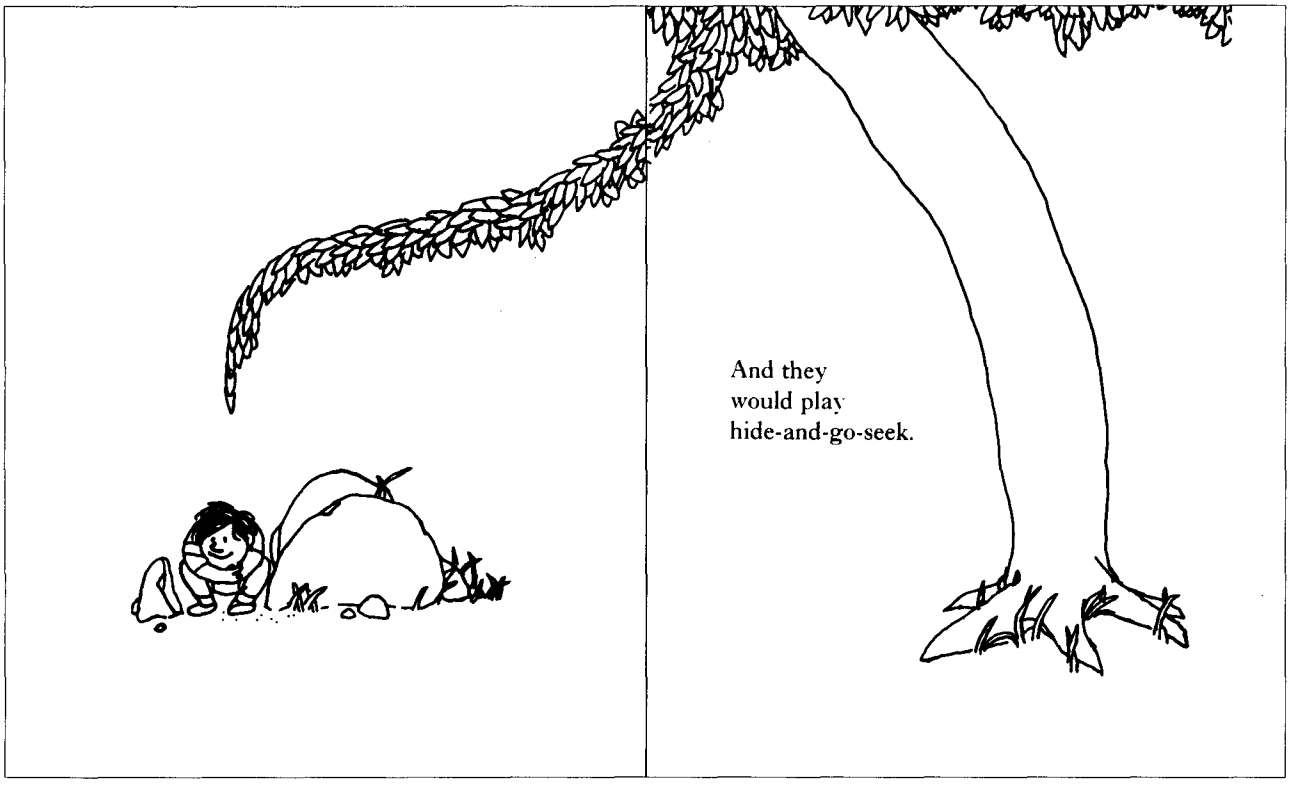

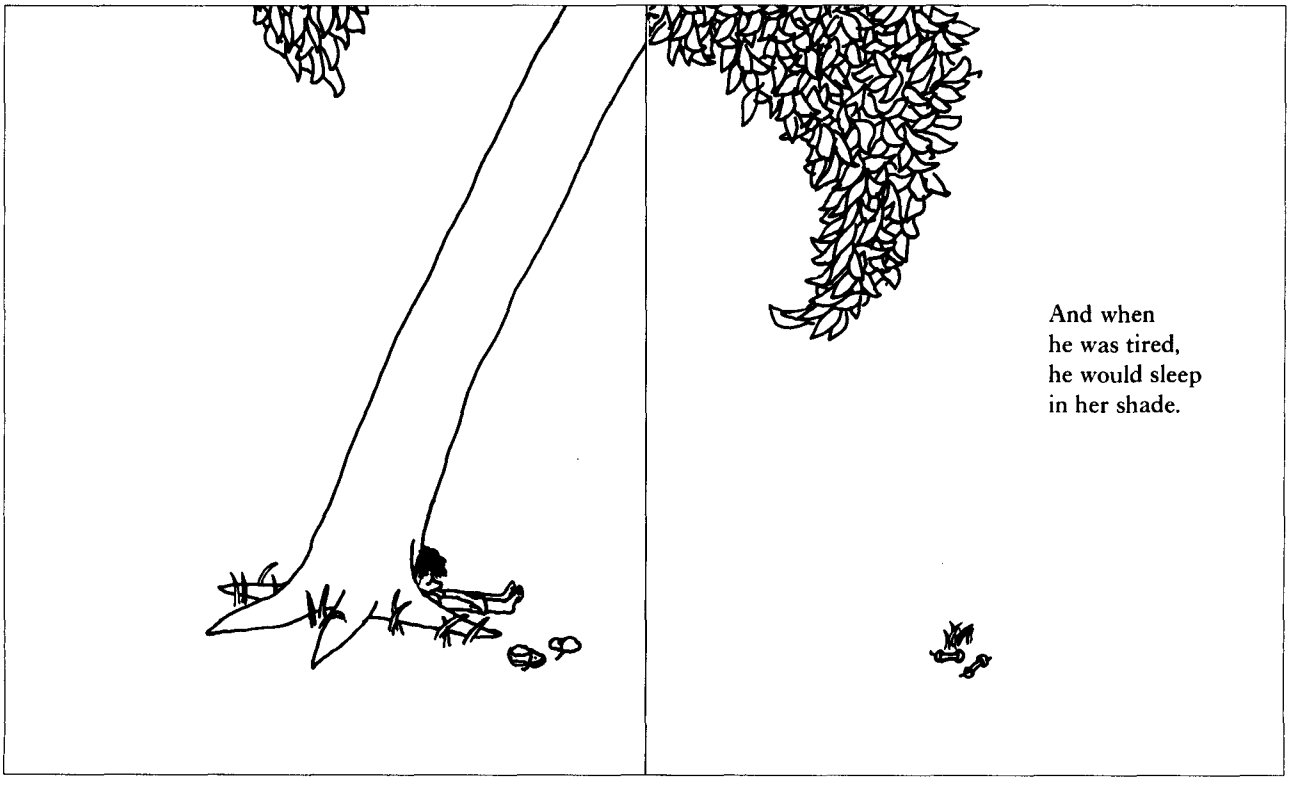

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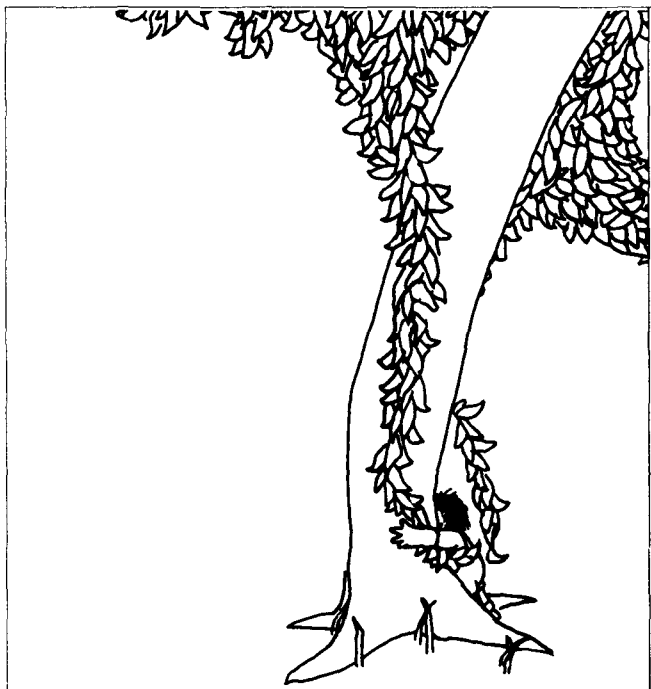
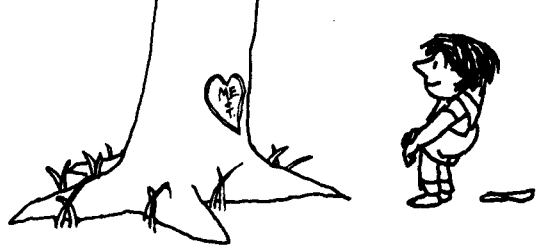


And the boy loved the tree . . .

very much.



And the tree was happy.

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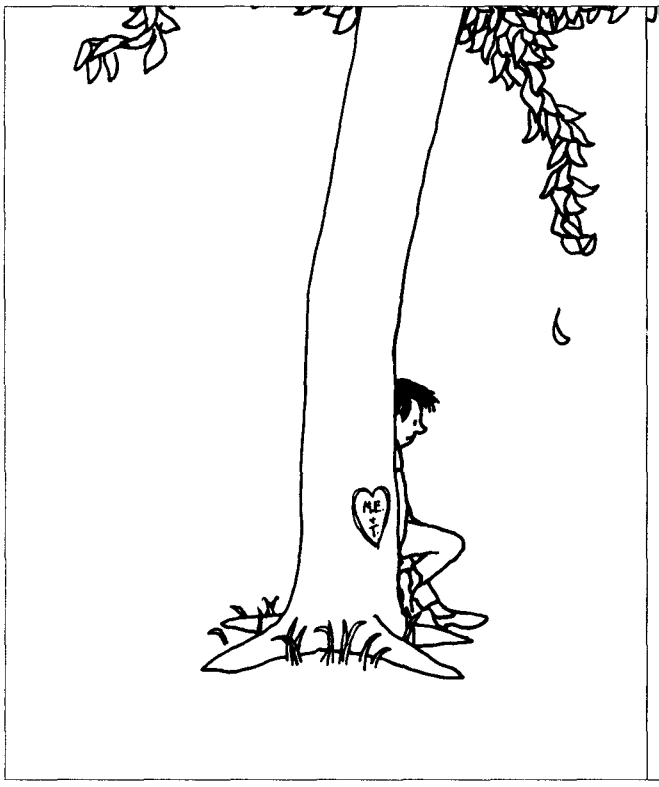
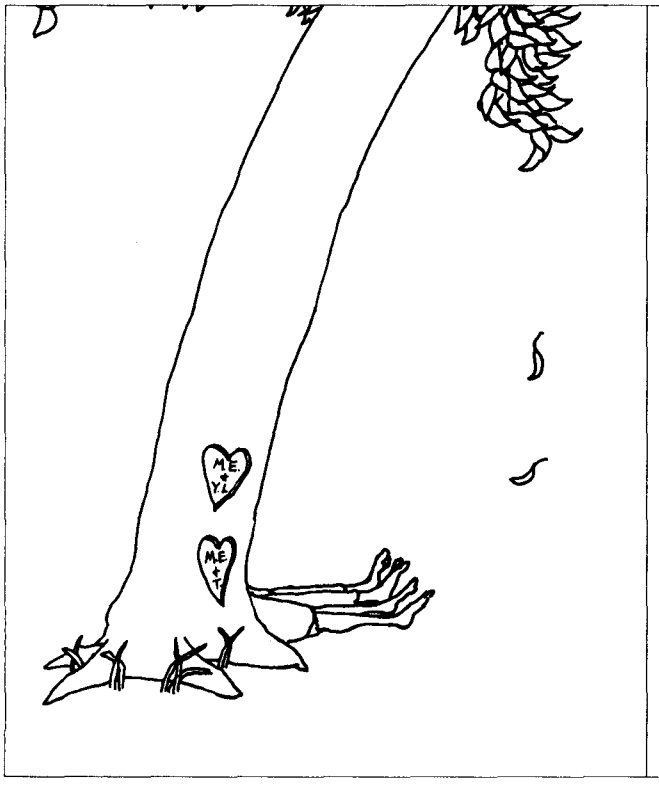


But time went by.



And the boy grew older.

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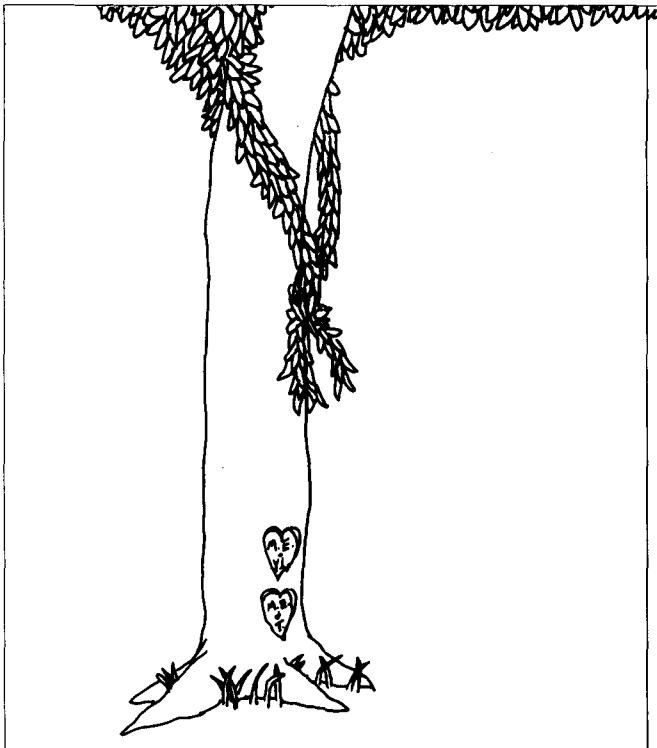
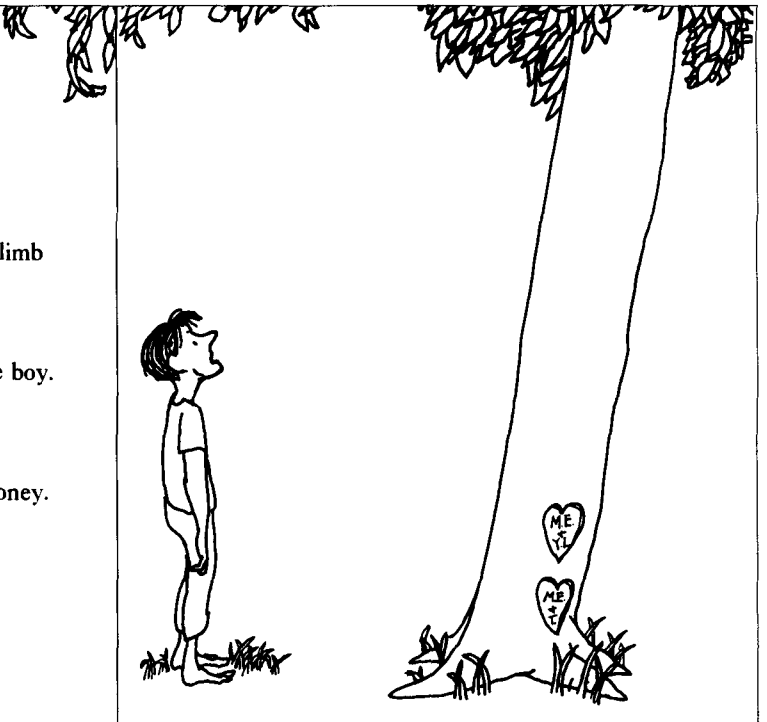


And the tree was often alone.

Then one day the boy came to the tree
and the tree said, "Come, Boy, come and climb
up my trunk and swing from my branches
and eat apples and play in my shade
and be happy."
"I am too big to climb and play," said the boy.
"I want to buy things and have fun.
I want some money.
Can you give me some money?"
"I'm sorry," said the tree, "but I have no money.
I have only leaves and apples.
Take my apples, Boy, and sell them
in the city. Then you will have money
and you will be happy."



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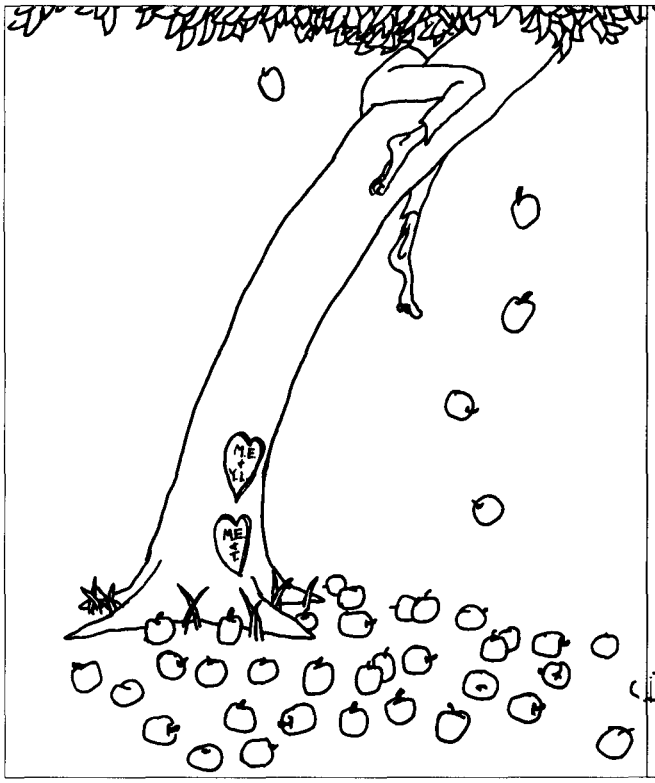
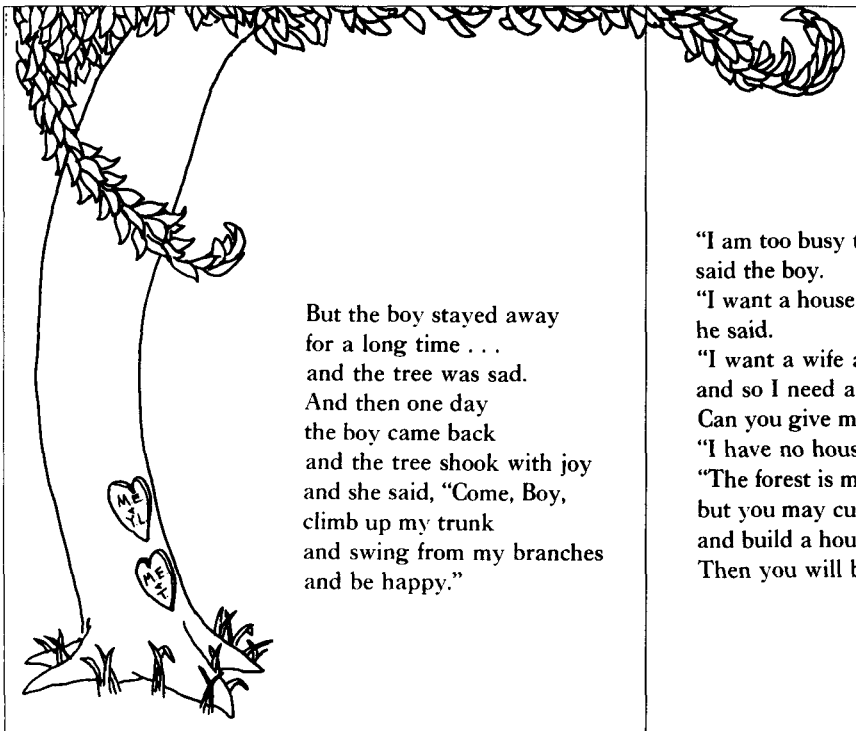


And so the boy climbed up the
tree and gathered
her apples
and carried them away.

And the tree was happy.



But the boy stayed away
for a long time . . .
and the tree was sad.
And then one day
the boy came back
and the tree shook with joy
and she said, "Come, Boy,
climb up my trunk
and swing from my branches
and be happy."

"I am too busy to climb trees,"
said the boy.
"I want a house to keep me warm,"
he said.
"I want a wife and I want children,
and so I need a house.
Can you give me a house?"
"I have no house," said the tree.
"The forest is my house,
but you may cut off my branches
and build a house.
Then you will be happy."

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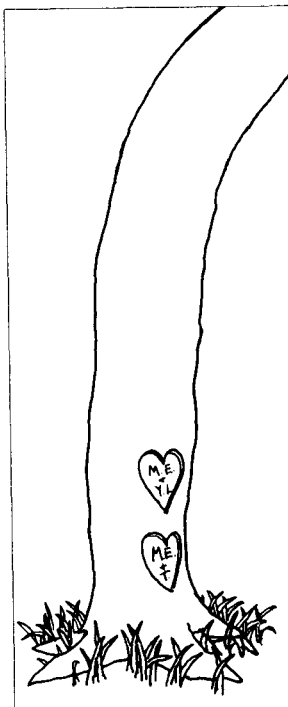
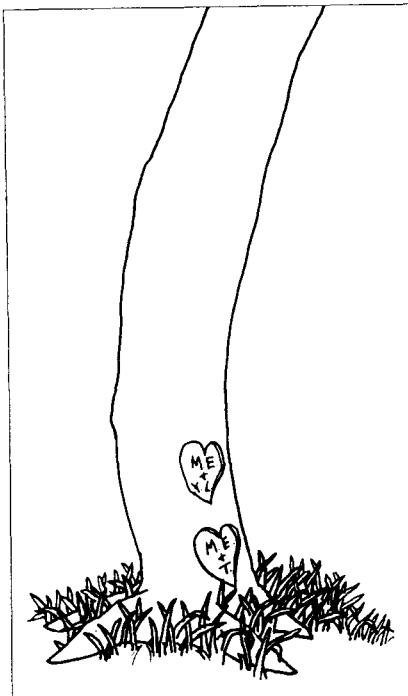


And so the boy cut off
her branches
and carried them away
to build his house.



And the tree was happy.

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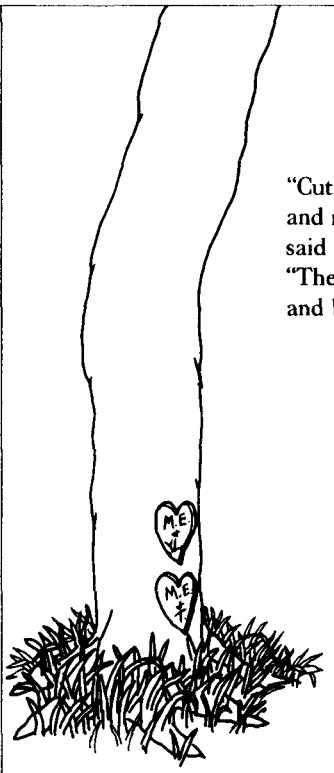
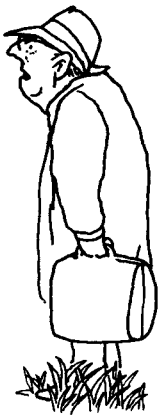
But the boy stayed away
for a long time.
And when he came back,
the tree was so happy
she could hardly speak.
"Come, Boy," she whispered,
"come and play."
"I am too old and sad to play,"
said the boy.
"I want a boat that will
take me far away
from here.
Can you give me a boat?"

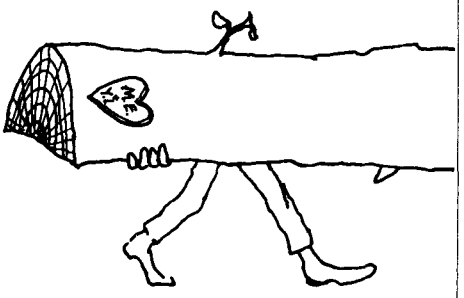


"Cut down my trunk
and make a boat,"
said the tree.
"Then you can sail away . . .
and be happy."



And so the boy cut down her trunk

and made a boat and sailed away.



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And the tree was happy . . .

but not really.

And after a long time
the boy came back again.
"I am sorry, Boy,"
said the tree, "but I have nothing
left to give you—

My apples are gone."
"My teeth are too weak
for apples," said the boy.
"My branches are gone,"
said the tree. "You
cannot swing on them—"
"I am too old to swing
on branches," said the boy.
"My trunk is gone," said the tree.
"You cannot climb—"
"I am too tired to climb," said the boy.
"I am sorry," sighed the tree.
"I wish that I could
give you something . . .
but I have nothing left. I am just
an old stump. I am sorry. . . ."

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"I don't need very much now,"
said the boy,
"just a quiet place to sit and rest.
I am very tired."
"Well," said the tree,
straightening herself up
as much as she could,
"well, an old stump *is* good
for sitting and resting.
Come, Boy, sit down.
Sit down and rest."

And the boy did.

And the tree was happy.

The End

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William F. May

On one take, a trick picture at a carnival appears to be a gargoyle; but, at a second glance, the Mona Lisa shines through. Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* is no visual trick, but the story intrigues because it provokes quite contrary interpretations.

On first reading, the harshness of the story depresses: a compulsive giver fatally bonds with a predatory taker. A kind of codependency takes hold, with lethal consequences for them both. The tree gives and gives and gives, and the boy takes; and, as he grows, he continues to take, right on through adolescence, manhood, and old age. In the course of lifelong giving, the tree relentlessly diminishes—from a gloriously alive, leaf-resplendent tree to a stump. And the taker diminishes as well, from a boy, zestfully at play in the tree, to a bent old man, resting on the stump. Giver and taker, both end up diminished, depleted, exhausted. On the face of it, that's what the story gloomily shows.

If, moreover, one thinks of the tree as the motherly feminine or as a symbol for the whole of nature, the shadows lengthen into a bleak morality tale about an oblivious male chauvinism or about an environmentally destructive anthropocentrism, both ominously foretold when, early on, the boy gathers leaves and weaves them into a crown and struts about playing king of the forest, his nose lifted high in the air.

But at another level, the story hints at a possibility in love somewhat brighter than the actual human (particularly the parental) experience of it. Unlike human love, what the tree has to offer is almost providentially apt to the boy/adolescent/man's changing needs. As a boy he needs to play; and the tree provides him with a sacred space, pole and shelter under which to play and branches in which to adventure. In smoky adolescence, he needs a place to confide/proclaim his feelings, and the tree provides him with a stretch of bark on which to initial his love. In manhood, he needs wood to build a house and, later, still more wood to build a boat on which to ship out in midlife escape; and the tree, each time, obliges to the point of reducing itself to a stump on which the exhausted old man finally comes home to rest.

Clearly, the tree never faces the terrible stymie that confronts parents who fiercely love their children but also discover that they cannot provide them with what they most need—a mate, self-confidence, a reason for living, whatever. One way or another, human parental love comes a cropper; whereas the tree somehow manages to rise to the occasion. What the tree gives in each case is wonderfully apt.

The story also suggests, at this second level, a remarkable progression in love beyond the usual limits of philanthropy. A philanthropist gives out of the margins of his or her resources, out of surplus, if you will. The philanthropist takes care not to let the beneficiary invade the core self. Thus professional philanthropoids at the great foundations like to preserve capital assets so as to survive to another day; and amateur givers as well like to maintain some distance between themselves and beneficiaries to stave off troublesome dependencies that will diminish them or limit their freedom. Philanthropic love is love without ties.

The tree begins, to be sure, offering a love that resembles philanthropic love; its gifts do not cost. It provides utterly costless shade, and it gives of its leaves and its fruit (both highly renewable resources). But then the story turns darker. Or does it turn toward the transcendent, the sublime? The tree presses on to a level of giving which the philanthropist can only interpret as self-diminishing, self-destructive. But the tree apparently doesn't see it that way. It says that it is happy.

What is this claim? The slaphappiness of the compulsive giver? Or something more? The clearheaded affirmation of a self that cannot diminish itself through its own expenditure because self-expenditure is its unfailing core? And so the tree offers its branches, its trunk, even its stump: "'Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest.' And the boy did. And the tree was happy." What kind of tree is this? Some sort of cross between the human and the divine? I am stumped.

WILLIAM F. MAY *is the Cary M. Maguire Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University.*

Amy A. Kass

Shortly before my first child was born, my mother told me the following story, which she had heard from her rabbi. A mother bird and her three fledglings came to the bank of a river, too wide for the young ones to cross on their own. Taking the first fledgling onto her wing, the mother bird began to carry him across, and while over the middle of the river she asked him the following question: "My dear son, when I am old and too feeble to fly far, will you carry me across?" Promptly and respectfully, her son replied, "Of course, mama," whereupon the mother bird dropped him into the water below to drown. Repeating the test on her next fledging, she elicited the same response, and so dropped him, too, into the waters below. Gathering up her last fledgling, the mother bird administered her test one last time: "My dear son, when I am old and too feeble to fly far, will you carry me across?" Unlike his brothers, the last fledgling slowly but thoughtfully replied, "No mother, I will not do it for you, but I will do it for my own children." The mother bird, now happily assured of her future, flew her son across the river and lovingly deposited him on its distant shore.

Like Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, my

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mother's tale is a profound parable about giving between mothers and children. But reflecting back, I think I would have been better served by Silverstein's. For according to my mother's tale, giving is an investment in one's grandchildren and great-grandchildren—one gives for the sake of making the recipients of one's gifts into givers themselves. However true and important this may be, it requires that the future resemble the past—one must trust that one's children will have children of their own—and in these uncertain times, this can be both a snare and a delusion. Silverstein's parable, on the other hand, countenances no such illusions, either about what begets givers or about the unknown future. Rather, it makes vivid the intrinsic virtue of giving to one's children, here and now, and shows the happiness that inevitably accrues to the mother who can so wholeheartedly give. In brief, it makes clear what it means and what it takes to be a good mother.

From the outset, the tree gives the boy unqualified love. Always welcoming him with outstretched limbs, she willingly meets his most pressing needs; she gives him food to satisfy his hunger, shelter under which to rest his tired body, and companionship to ward off loneliness. But in addition, she attends to his psychic growth: she gives him swinging branches to develop agility, judgment, and courage; she plays hide-and-seek to cultivate enterprise, ingenuity, and a sense of timing; and she gives him leaves to encourage his imagination to soar. Under her deft tutelage, the boy learns to beat down his fears; he gains confidence and self-respect, and the capacity to love. It is little wonder that he takes to crowning himself with his self-made wreaths and strutting about with his nose pointing upward. The boy pretends to be the King of the Forest because he thinks he is a king. It is little wonder that beholding the boy's evident joy and pride and strength, the tree, too, is happy.

The boy's life, however, is not destined to live up to his great expectations. With time the many sensibilities previously awakened and nourished naturally turn outward. The simple pleasures he once enjoyed no longer suffice. While the tree silently and discreetly stands by, the boy, like most blossoming youths, turns his attention first toward the opposite sex. Next, he decides he needs "things to have fun," and the tree, indulging his growing appetites, gives him her fruit to sell for cash. Later still, he wants a house to shelter and raise a family of his own, and once again, the tree obliges by giving him her branches. Much later, his dreams of domestic bliss apparently shattered, the boy wants a boat to carry him away from his sorrows and troubles, and once again, the tree readily and lovingly obliges, this time by giving him her trunk. Much, much later, the boy, now quite old, returns to the tree one last time. Though alone and enfeebled, he is still wanting, now for a place to sit and rest. Yet again, the tree lovingly obliges: straightening up her much-diminished self, she invites him to sit on her stump. With each gift, despite her own evident depletion, we are told that the tree is happy. Only once, when the boy's life journey takes him far across the seas, that is, far, far away from the tree, are we told that her happiness is less than complete. Why? How can that be?

Like all good mothers, the tree is no doubt happy to know that she could help when needed. But more importantly, like the ideal mother she is, the tree seems to understand both the nature and limits of her own maternal powers. She knows that the very sensibilities she so carefully nourished when the boy was young would one day cause him to want a life of his own. She knows she must understand and accept the choices the boy makes even when they seem unwise and misguided. She knows she cannot predict or arrange the boy's future. Most especially, she knows, probably from the beginning, that the life she will nourish must cost her her own, and she anticipates necessity by giving her young child everything most needful, trusting that a happy and loving childhood will see him through the sorrows and pains of tomorrow. For she knows that happy memories can become holy: they can anchor and sustain one's life. Though in the end the boy becomes old and enfeebled, neither he nor the tree is broken: despite his wanderings, he does safely return; despite his many hardships, he still has hope. Does this not affirm the tree's wisdom? Is not this a sufficient reason for happiness?

Yes, I would read this story to my children—my grown children. It is wise and it is true about giving and about motherhood.

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Marc Gellman

The ethics of giving are different from the ethics of taking. One can give out of the utter goodness of one's nature, and yet bestow these gifts upon one with an insatiable need to take. So we must say that the giver is pure while the taker is corrupt. Legions of spoiled children raised by doting but utterly well-meaning parents are sad evidence of this complex moral dialectic of giving and taking.

In the story *The Giving Tree*, we have a pure and selfless giver bestowing gifts upon an ungrateful, spoiled, and demanding boy/man. Even if we grant that each loves the other, we can still judge the moral quality of the two loves. The love of the tree for the boy/man is a selfless love, while the love of the boy for the tree is a selfish love. The boy never tries to help the tree (by pruning it, feeding it, etc.), while the entire being of the tree is devoted to helping the boy meet his most recent need, whether trivial or essential. The needs escalate and so do the gifts, leading to

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the offer of the tree to be decimated to a stump just to make a boat—a boat that will take the boy away to some place far from the tree. On the other hand, the love of the tree for the boy is selfless to the greatest degree. The gifts of the tree to the boy are not the proof of her love, but rather the signs of her love. The tree gives because that is what one does for those one loves. Love is an emptying of the self into another. The greatness of love is that such emptying is followed by a self-discovery that is spiritually complete.

On a philosophical level we can use the relationship of the tree and the boy as a way to remind ourselves of the very different judgments produced by utilitarian and deontological ethical systems. Judged by the results of her actions, the tree is culpable before the bar of utilitarian judgment because she produced a spoiled little snot. Judged by her motives, however, the tree remains deontologically pristine.

One final philosophical question: even if we agree that benevolence is supererogatory in a way that non-malevolence is not, even if we agree that our duty to give and help is much weaker than our duty not to hurt, we can still ask if giving, helping, and bestowing can in some cases become wicked: wicked because it is debilitating to the self-reliance of the recipient; wicked because it deprives one of the capacity to give also to others; wicked because it infantilizes the recipient; wicked because it cements a bond between giver and taker that should be much more evanescent.

In the end I am convinced that the tree was a well-meaning but foolish giver, and yet I am strangely in awe of that foolishness—perhaps because it is so Buddha-like, so profoundly indifferent to the demands of keeping and protecting assets in this selfish and wounded world. The Buddhists call this virtue *tanhakaya* and they mean by it the release from attachment to the things of the world. It is the third of the four-fold noble truth that stands at the heart of Buddhist dharma. The cause of suffering is attachment, and its cure is release, a simultaneous release from both the world and all need. In that final liberation—perhaps come to sitting upon the tree stump—both the tree and the man are free.

* * *

An ancillary fable from the teaching of the Hasidic master Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, as recounted by Martin Buber in his *Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters* (Schocken).

> Rabbi Yitzchak of Vorki knocked, entered Rabbi Mendel's room, and said in greeting: "Peace be with you, Rabbi."
>
> "Why do you say rabbi to me?" grumbled the rabbi of Kotzk. "I am no rabbi! Don't you recognize me! I'm the goat! I'm the sacred goat. Don't you remember the story?
>
> "An old Jew once lost his snuff box made of horn, on his way to the house of study. He wailed: 'Just as if the dreadful exile weren't enough, this must happen to me! Oh me, oh my, I've lost my snuffbox made of horn!' And then he came upon the sacred goat. The sacred goat was pacing the earth, and the tips of his black horns touched the stars. When he heard the old Jew lamenting, he leaned down to him, and said: 'Cut a piece from my horns, whatever you need to make a new snuffbox.' The old Jew did this, made a new snuffbox, and filled it with tobacco. Then he went to the house of study and offered everyone a pinch. They snuffed and snuffed, and everyone who snuffed it cried: 'Oh, what wonderful tobacco! It must be because of the box. Oh what a wonderful box! Wherever did you get it?'
>
> "So the old man told them about the good sacred goat, and then one after the other they went out on the street and looked for the sacred goat. The sacred goat was pacing the earth and the tips of his black horns touched the stars. One after another they went up to him and begged permission to cut off a bit of his horns. Time after time the sacred goat leaned down to grant the request. Box after box was made and filled with tobacco. The fame of the boxes spread far and wide. At every step he took the sacred goat met someone who asked for a piece of his horns.
>
> "Now the sacred goat still paces the earth—but he has no horns."

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Midge Decter

Trust not the teller, D. H. Lawrence warned—thereby articulating the single most important guiding principle for the reading of any literary work—trust the tale. Shel Silverstein seemed to think that his book was about "giving," for that is how he titled it; but the book one reads is actually about something else. The story it tells is about growing up and growing old—processes, to judge from his illustrations, for which he has no very great reverence. (We must pay attention to these illustrations, not only because their author is very much an illustrator and thus says as much through them as through his words, but because in *every* book for little children what is to be seen counts at least equally with what is heard. That, for instance, is what makes the Babar stories, whose texts are singularly dreary, enduring classics. And why ugly children's books should be banned.)

Look at the book, then, through the eyes of a child.

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The "hero" is at first a little boy who climbs and swings and pretends he is the king of the forest. And the tree . . . is a tree, realizing, if you will, its treeness. Then the boy gets older, puts away his little-boy things, is interested in a girl, and carves his and her initials into the tree trunk. The tree is still a tree, now the repository of his wish to make some lasting declaration of his existence. Next he feels the need for money and works at carrying off and selling the tree's apples, and after that, he uses the wood of the tree to build himself a house in which to shelter a wife and children. And all the while he is growing less and less attractive: a slumping adolescent, then a surly-faced young adult, then a balding and paunchy grown man. Some time later he returns to the tree—now a round-shouldered, sharp-beaked, unhappy middle-aged man, longing to get away. This is the figure who cuts the tree down to a stump in order to build himself a boat in which to escape and see the world. And finally he returns to the stump, a bent and outright ugly old man, able now to do nothing more than sit and rest upon all that is left of his old friend. Meanwhile, the tree, too, has been getting older, each time having less to offer but happy to find that it can still be put to use.

Here we have a tale of frequently lonely self-sacrifice—to, as they say, the very max—in the face of a continuing, lifelong exploitation. But is it, as it claims, a story about true givingness? The boy is after all doing what is required of human beings to do: he is growing up, going away, making himself a living, cleaving unto a wife, and later, in his declining years, finding a life for himself—and finally, growing old and in need of a place to rest. *The Giving Tree* is, to put it mildly, somewhat less than generous, either in word or in picture, about this process.

Thus the tree may be giving (although it, too, is only fulfilling its nature), but the spirit of the book is hardly so. For what it tells us—hardly the message I would wish to be conveyed to my grandchildren—is that life after childhood is a progressive, and progressively distasteful, falling off.

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Gilbert Meilaender

Why is it that the boy keeps coming back to the tree? Well, why shouldn't he, the cynic might ask. He gets what he wants, the tree exercises no control over his desires, the tree in fact writes him a kind of blank check within the limit of her powers. Her self-giving is unqualified. Why shouldn't he greedily return to get what he can in the service of his desires?

There is a part of me that is drawn to this reading I call cynical. We might wonder, for example, whether any mother should ever love her child as the tree does the boy—giving the child whatever he wants. Indeed, we might even argue that such a love does not lead to growth, that it finally diminishes both tree and boy. But I don't think that is the deepest truth of this story.

The boy keeps coming back. Why? Not just that his needs may be served, but because "the boy loved the tree." That remains true throughout. When the tree helps the boy realize some of his desires, those wants are legitimate—to eat and to play, to buy things and have fun, to have a house and family, to sail away and (one suspects) begin anew, to rest. But through all of this, when the boy seems merely to be taking and the tree only to be giving, the boy loves the tree. If that is said only once, the reality is plain. For the heart with "ME & T" carved into the tree is never effaced. When the tree is taken down to a stump, that expression of love still remains.

The boy keeps coming back not simply because he gets what he wants from the tree, but because he loves the tree. And we must therefore ask what makes the boy's love possible. Not, I think, only the things the tree gives, but that she gives herself without stinting. The boy returns not because the tree requires it, but because the tree's love makes it possible for him to leave and return. The tree's giving makes possible a *relative* independence for the boy, makes it possible for him to live apart from her. But the tree's giving also sustains a continuing bond. The boy is not therefore diminished by the tree's selfless giving; he is helped to grow and live, to achieve relative independence *within* a mutual bond of love.

But what of the tree? Is she finally diminished? Only if we think we know the tree better than she knows herself. Only if when the tree is happy we think it necessary to raise her consciousness and help her see that she is not. And more important, only if we suppose that happiness is secured solely by independent personal growth, and not through mutual dependence in a bond of love. The tree's giving is not without risk; there is, after all, no guarantee that the boy will come back. But he does—does what she deeply desired but did not require of him. And the tree is therefore rightly happy. She has given well.

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Mary Ann Glendon

In future histories of popular culture, *The Giving Tree* will be seen as a period piece—a nursery tale for the "me" generation, a primer of narcissism, a catechism of exploitation. It will be catalogued with pop hits like "I want it all, and I want it now."

Let's review the plot. Boy enters on the scene with the unfocused wants of any very young child. Like lots of little kids, he thinks he's the center of the universe; in the forest he pretends he's king of all he sur-

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veys. No harm in that. Tree loves him and he loves Tree in the way that small children and those nearest to them love each other. As time goes by, however, Boy seems not to have learned a few simple truths that are usually instilled in children by those who genuinely care for their well-being. He shows no awareness, for example, of the idea that one should treat others as one would wish to be treated oneself. Boy visits Tree only when he wants things—money as a youth, a house in early adulthood, escape in later years. Tree gives first of her abundance (leaves, apples) and later of her substance (branches, trunk). Finally, when old, broken-down Boy has no more desires except to rest, he sits on what's left of Tree. "And the tree was happy."

Whatever the author's intentions, his message about love, especially in that last line, is apt to sound something like this to a young audience: If people love you, they will not only give you everything you want, but will ask no questions and make no demands on you. The more they love you, the happier they will be to respond to your desires.

If we concentrated only on Boy, we might have a morality tale here. By the end of the book, Boy has made himself into a certain kind of person through a series of choices and actions. He has constituted himself as a taker, and ends up without happiness, fulfillment, or even understanding of his own condition.

But the author seems to want us to focus on Tree. If the image of the giving tree as a happy provider of unconditional love was meant to be ironic, that irony will probably escape the kids to whom the book is addressed. Most young children will see Tree as a loving, parent-like figure. Yet the fact is that Tree's qualities would make her a terrible mother—a masochist who, quite predictably, has raised a sociopath.

So *The Giving Tree* cannot be taken at face value as a story about human giving and receiving. It's about taking, maiming, and killing, on one side, and passively submitting to such treatment on the other. (Even if Boy doesn't understand about photosynthesis, his conduct in taking Tree's branches amounts to reckless arboricide.)

Is the story meant, then, to be an allegory of divine love? If so, the author has got his Bible mixed up with his Sears Roebuck wishbook. For though Tree gives till it hurts, all her giving is in response to Boy's material wants. Whatever it means to say she "loved" Boy, she did not care for him enough to set him straight on a few minor points, like saying "Thank you," or treating others as fellow human beings rather than as instruments for the satisfaction of his own desires. No wonder we hear nothing about Boy's wife and children except that he "wanted" to have them. If he did have a family, they must not have been as sappy as Tree, for on his next visit Boy wants a boat to sail away.

Tree gets no credit for performing corporal works of mercy. Her gifts to Boy are not in response to his needs, but rather in furtherance of his appetites and desires. Nor can she be viewed as a paragon of spiritual works. For one of the most important, difficult, and delicate duties incumbent on one who loves is to point out to loved ones the natural and probable consequences of their acts. Parents begin with little things, like teaching children why we shouldn't pull up flowers by their roots—or carve our initials in the bark of trees. Never encountering any check, Boy's demands escalate, and his depredations become more and more outrageous.

The Giving Tree is an artifact of an era that later generations will contemplate with pity and horror. An era when many parents turned their children over to subminimum-wage workers by day, and told them stories like *The Giving Tree* during "quality time" at night. An era when hordes of American Boys and Girls pursued infantile fantasies and desires until they could eat, drink, and make merry no more. An era when many of us behaved like Tree—tolerant, indulgent, but not loving enough to call good and evil by name.

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William Werpehowski

My six-year-old son Stephen told me he that he already knew *The Giving Tree* "from kindergarten," but now he was excited about reading it on his own. When he finished he said that he loved the story. I asked him the leading question: "Do you think the tree gave too much?" "No," Steve told me, "because she loved the boy, and she wanted to make him happy." He did not add, as more than a few of my students might, "and if that's what makes her happy, if that's her opinion, then who am I to say she can't do that?" He also did not suggest that he was worried about the tree's lack of self-respect, or about whether the boy was a mean and selfish "taker." He did not even focus on the role that gender plays in the story. For him *The Giving Tree* simply concerned how somebody's love for another involved giving in ways that, while sometimes sad, lead to happy endings. Let me take it from there.

The tale begins with the fact of the tree's love for the boy. What follows is a depiction of the history, character, and costs of this love. This history includes periods of union as well as absence through which the love stands fast. Indeed, its precise character emerges by way of this constancy. This is a love, first, that is *disinterested* in that it cherishes the boy's good for its own sake. It is also, of course, a "rejoicing in the presence of the beloved," as the theologian

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H. Richard Niebuhr put it; but neither presence nor union is love's prior condition, and while each would be a welcomed and hoped-for goal, that goal is not demanded. The tree is "happy" in her giving even when there are no hugs for her, and even when the boy goes away.

Second, we are dealing with a *generous* love. Not only does the tree love the boy for his own sake, but she gives to him what she no doubt knows is valuable and would have some "stake" in keeping. Crucially, she gives what is more than would be customarily expected. I think that the idea of this "more" must eventually occur to the reader during the course of the giving of apples, branches, and trunk. Now there may be criticisms of this sort of giving as foolish or weak-willed or even unjust (the critic can note that the boy does not once say, "Thank you"). It would be extremely odd, however, to characterize it as tightfisted. Surely the contrary is true.

Yet it is important for the reader to see that, third, the tree's love for the boy is not merely generous but also, literally, *self-expending*. What she gives to him includes goods neither replaceable nor peripherally related to who she is; she gives what appears to be constitutive of her very being. The depth of the self-expenditure in *The Giving Tree* poses for us the difficult question of whether we can commend in our everyday lives a love that seems so thoroughly to diminish the self, or that can reduce our prospects for flourishing as the creatures we were apparently meant or expected to be.

When "the boy cut down her trunk and made a boat and sailed away," "the tree was happy . . . but not really." Why "not really"? There are a number of answers, and it contributes to the story's richness that they need not be exclusive. The tree is sad for the boy, and sad that he is going away perhaps never to return (Stephen's preferred reading). The tree is "sorry" that she has nothing left to give (as what immediately follows can suggest). The tree might be sorrowing over an act that, under the circumstances, decisively calls the boy's moral regard for the tree into question. Finally, the tree is not really happy because she is now in some sense no longer a tree, or, more precisely, no longer a being who may "flourish" in the ways we usually think trees do.

So we return to my leading question. I agree with my son's answer to it because the tree displays, fourth, a certain sort of *abiding* love. As a feature of her constancy, the tree endures or suffers her losses without failing to care for the boy. She waits patiently for the boy to return, and remains ready both to celebrate his presence and to serve his good. And in the story's ending, we find that by her love the tree has become, yet again, one in and with whom the beloved may abide. Distinguished only by the bond inscribed on her heart, and "straightening herself up as much as she could," she gives him a place to feel at home and be safe and find rest in her presence. Thus she is happy. This abiding of each with the other is what an abiding, enduring love hopes for. It cannot be demanded, let alone guaranteed. But it is this hope, as it is sent forth and realized in *The Giving Tree*, that assures us that the tree loved well, and gave well.

The story of this love is not just for story books. With most of us, it is not one person we love or care for, but many. In these responsibilities to others—our spouses, parents, children, friends, neighbors, colleagues, strangers—we do and should look out for their well-being as something inherently good. We also at times will give to them more than is expected, perhaps to the point of expending ourselves in some measure, and bearing up through pain and loss. And as a consequence, we may find ourselves "diminished." We get weary or anxious, and our powers and energies flag. Projecting some individual success or prospect that would be available to us were it not for our responsibilities to others, we may detach or distance ourselves from these bonds, or at least be ready to, in order to guarantee against "losing ourselves."

The Giving Tree presents an alternative ideal. It is that what appears to be self-loss may be in reality our deepest fulfillment, since service, not detachment, makes us into creatures with whom our fellows may in some way abide. Abiding with them, we may be happy. According to the Christian Gospel, this "ideal" is set before us as a task to which we are called by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. But that's another story.

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Timothy Fuller

Thoughts after reading *The Giving Tree*:

Those who endure to the end—are they saved?
Those who give without limit—are they rewarded?
To those who ask—is something always given?
To those who are given—do they know gratitude?

Is the tree greater than the man?
Does the man redeem the gifts he receives?
Is there friendship? Can the man return the grace?
Is the tree loving? Dependency-creating?

Is the life of the boy/man a mere repetitive cycle? Does it have purpose? Destiny? Fate? Salvation? Redemption? Pleasure? Significance? Strength? Courage? Beauty? Love? Pleasure? Independence?

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Is there here self-critical awareness? Maturity? Responsibility? Loyalty? Justification? Struggle? Insight? Illumination? Success? Failure? Depth? Spirituality? Reflection? Repentance? Contemplation?

Is there rootedness? Tradition? Knowledge? Happiness? Sadness? Success? Failure? Hope? Despair? Prudence? Generosity? Liberality? Justice? Self-regulation? Civic-mindedness? Character?

Is nature innocent, naive? Does the man exploit nature? Is there an ought-to-be in this is? Does sentimentality conquer all?

Are there qualities here? Is this a start and a stop with only sentimentality between, no meaning?

Might we prefer dramatic encounter with contingency through which the eternal shines, eliciting creative response, self-discovery, and transparency of soul to being? Yes.

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Leon R. Kass

Several reasons could be offered for reading *The Giving Tree* to one's children. It conveys important truths about our human situation and about human giving. It might induce appropriate attitudes and salutary sentiments or inspire fine conduct by imitation. And it could occasion educative moral discourse—about giving and receiving, about loving and being loved, and about what makes for human happiness.

All of us live and flourish only because we are the beneficiaries of unconditional and unmerited generosity, natural and human. We are graciously fed with the bounty of nature, from mother's milk to the fruits of the earth, and not because we deserve it. Beginning even before we are born, we live necessarily as consumers of the substance of others—of their bodies and labors, their time and energy, their attention and care, their love. We live using up not only the renewable resources—like leaves and apples—but also the irreplaceable essence—branches and trunk—of others, especially of our parents, and most especially of our mothers.

The giving tree, identified as female, is an image of mother love. She loves the boy selflessly and unconditionally, because he is her own. Because she loves him, which is to say, because she desires his happiness above all else, she gives to him without condition and without measure. Her own happiness consists in contributing to his happiness: only when she thinks she has nothing left to give him is she not happy to see him, and her happiness is restored—as is her dignity: "Straightening herself up as much as she could"—when she realizes that she can still give him what he needs. Blessed is the mother who is able to help her child, at whatever age. This truth about parental happiness is surely known by any loving parent who has been compelled to watch impotently while his child is suffering.

To some especially "liberated" readers, the self-sacrificing behavior of the tree will seem perverse: Why does she not give only of her surplus, in a giving that does not exhaust the giver, in a giving that does not destroy the possibility of future giving? But here speaks only calculation, not mother love. Indeed, the tree's self-expenditure is, at the same time, paradoxically not self-denial but self-fulfillment—at least self-fulfillment as a loving mother and as a giver. For her child is, in a sense, the mother-at-work: she lives in her children and in their flourishing. Besides, to live means always to spend one's substance—one's time, one's effort, one's soul. Those who are always husbanding their resources or their being for some future occasion do not live, and hence cannot live happily.

Yet the happiness of the boy served by the tree differs from the tree's own happiness of service. True, formally considered, happiness for both of them is the perfect match between the heart's desires and the power to satisfy them. But the boy's desires are not like the tree's. He seeks to enjoy the ordinary pleasures of life: child's play, young love, marital and paternal fulfillment, distraction from sorrows, a restful old age. Although in no way grand, these are decent enough desires, in no way reprehensible. Yet the boy is not himself a giver, nor is there anything in the ever-indulgent conduct of his unconditionally loving mother that would encourage or induce him to imitate her generosity.

If the tree—and mother love—is to be faulted it is not for self-denial but for lack of wisdom. To give without qualification is defective not because it gains nothing in return for the giver but because it may be harmful to the recipient. For giving to be excellent, it must be done wisely—which is to say, one must give the right thing, at the right time, in the right way. How can giving—or loving—be good if it does not foster goodness in the recipient? Mother love is, by its very nature, prone to prodigality and foolishness: loving their own without qualification, mothers often love not wisely but too well.

Could reading the story of mother love to a child supply what mother love lacks? Perhaps a precocious child, identifying with the boy, will come to see how much he owes to his mother. Admiration for her selfless love and extraordinary generosity—undemanding and unrequited—might in a noble nature induce gratitude or, at least, prompt shame for ingratitude. Perhaps the child as taker will come to identify also with the tree as giver, and will see—or at least hear—that the tree was happiest when she was giving: in the end, the "boy" (i.e., the old man) merely found rest, but only the tree was said to be happy. Perhaps conversation with the child about the story could help enlarge his little recipient's soul.

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I doubt it. The overt lesson of the story from the point of view of the boy is that the tree always has more to give, not that one should become a giver oneself. Besides, the poignancy of the story depends on self-conscious awareness of the life cycle—of puberty, leaving home, disappointment, and decline. It is a rare young child who senses what life has in store for him, or that he might someday be in the place of his mother or father, with a child of his own to love and rear. This is not a story likely to teach virtue or gratitude to a child when young.

Yet I would urge parents, especially today, to read this story to their children because of what it can do for us, the parents. For the giving tree is an emblem of the sacred memory of our own mother's love, without which our life and our progress into adulthood would have been impossible. If we were lucky, we had mothers who were always there, always generous, always loving: whatever trust we acquired regarding our own worthiness and the possible goodness of the world we learned—indirectly—from her generous love. Now, with children of our own to care for, we need spiritually to return to our source, which we are now able to see truly for the first time. Reading *The Giving Tree* to our children can thus inspire gratitude in us as parents and can encourage us to repay our debts to our own mothers (and fathers) in the only way we can—by gladly spending our substance in the loving care of our own children.

There may also be a small direct benefit to our children. For, God willing, children to whom *The Giving Tree* is read when they are young may eventually come to understand its meaning—and the meaning of having parents who read it to them—when they can—with rich memories—read it in turn to their own children.

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Timothy P. Jackson

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.
—William Butler Yeats

Ever since Eden, some of us have been phobic about apple trees. Having initially eaten of the wrong fruit, we will now not eat of any; we fear take-two on the Fall, so we deny the neediness that would make us consumers. We may even fault the giving trees of this world: they are too indulgent of others and too sacrificial of themselves. No self-respecting bough should let herself be sawed off, and no other-regarding boy should take without remorse. Codependency, we reason, is the root of life's evils. This is a mistake, however.

We are no longer in the Garden, and this time it is abstinence that means death. We are evidently *supposed* to fell and fashion trees; Jesus was a carpenter, after all. The voice of the serpent now praises prudent self-reliance, as though love does not expend itself unconditionally. George Orwell knew better. "The essence of being human," he wrote, "is . . . that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals." Shel Silverstein knows better too.

I cannot say that I read Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* to my children, since I have none. But the high compliment I can pay his story is that it makes me want to have readable children. *The Giving Tree* is a wonderful tale not only because it schools the young in the virtue of generosity but also because it encourages the old to be hopeful about the young—in spite of, even because of, their dependency. The primary lesson is that it is good to need each other.

It will be objected that the tree is masochistic and the boy ungrateful, yet early on we are told that the tree loves the boy and the boy loves the tree. Moreover, the tree's love is not an abstract, impersonal benevolence: she wants interaction and relationship. Like a mother, she is saddened by the boy's absence. The boy is rather self-absorbed, and I have no stake in defending him in detail. But I would not be too hard on him, either. Is not impatience the way of youth, and beyond? As the boy grows older, he visits the tree less often and his wants and needs change, but the latter are never merely destructive or unreasonable. Who has never asked his parents for material goods? It is the tree, in any event, with whom we should principally identify.

The boy does not stop to say, "Thank you" (a vice), and he does not consume resources sustainably (must we be *that* PC?). Nevertheless, he does mature. The evolving list of his desires includes: money, a house, a wife, children, a boat, and finally a quiet place to sit and rest. These are all intelligible, even predictable, and no pure taker would marry and build in the ways suggested. The boy's wish for the sailing trip is unexplained; maybe he is undergoing a midlife crisis, but perhaps he has lost his wife and family prematurely and needs to get away and forget. In any case, the tree's giving for the boy's sake continually makes her happy, with only one exception . . . when she has nothing more to give. When "the boy" (now an old man) is at last content to sit still with her, the tree, though stripped, is once again happy, even fulfilled.

Is this a sad tale? Well, it is sad in the same way that life is sad. We are all needy, and, if we are lucky and any good, we grow old using others and getting used

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up. Tears fall in our lives like leaves from a tree. Our finitude is not something to be regretted or despised, however; it is what makes giving (and receiving) possible. The more you blame the boy, the more you have to fault human existence. The more you blame the tree, the more you have to fault the very idea of parenting. Should the tree's giving be contingent on the boy's gratitude? If it were, if fathers and mothers waited on reciprocity before caring for their young, then we would all be doomed.

The tree is gladly crucified on the cross of itself. This joy in service marks the tree as the type of Christ: "This is my body which is given for you . . . " The tree would not infantilize "the boy" by giving him what he needs, any more than Christ would infantilize "the children of God" by dying for them. With God we have to take the active, conscious step of asking for help; the boy asks primarily for things, but he too must voice his vulnerability in order to be cared for. For all its gifting of itself, however, the tree is not untouched; it also *receives* from the boy. Even as a stump, the tree is literally marked by the boy's love. The carved heart with "M.E. + T." inside endures across all changes, simultaneously a scar and a sign of love. Love bears all things and it never ends, even if life does. We must think the tree happy, not like the absurd Sisyphus but like the Suffering Servant.

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Jean Bethke Elshtain

Recently I handed Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* to a bright and very giving mother of a three-month-old baby girl. Her first comment was, "Shel Silverstein. He's pretty famous, isn't he?" Her second comment, after reading *The Giving Tree*, was: "This is a vicious book. I'm surprised. I thought he was supposed to be a good children's author." I pressed this new mother. "Why," I asked, "do you think it's vicious?" And she said, "Well, just look at the tree. It has nothing left. It's just a stump. And the boy, or man, is just constantly 'gimme gimme' and he expects the tree to give him anything he wants or needs. He never really grows up. He's just spoiled. He's like so many Americans. He thinks there should always be someone to satisfy his wants anytime he wants anything." I concurred with this assessment; indeed, I had already formulated this assessment before I put the mother of our granddaughter JoAnn, our daughter Heidi, to the test. I am pleased, therefore, to report that she is a chip off the old maternal block, or a branch off the stem as the case may be. Let it also be said that Heidi's mother, unlike the "giving tree" in question, hopes to have a few working bits remaining when she reaches the end of this earthly pilgrimage. In other words, I do not aspire to stumpdom.

Why not? Am I, then, ungiving? I would hate to think so. In fact, I think the "giving" in Silverstein's story is suspect: it smacks of bad faith. Oh yes, we are told that the boy loves the tree and the tree loves the boy. They have a wonderful life together at the beginning, partly constructed out of the boy's fantasy that he is "king of the forest." Like the always good mother of infant fantasy, the tree supplies nourishment, shelter, succor, and is a fun pal to boot. The tree and the boy are happy, poised in a kind of eternal equilibrium (or the tree, presumably, would have it so), a world in which nothing ever happens or changes.

But change will come. The boy grows older. The tree just stands there—it is, after all, a tree. The tree doesn't find new company. It is alone. This is an ideal fantasy for the one who has deserted, namely, that what one has deserted is frozen in time, expectant, awaiting one's return. Life doesn't go on for the tree, although the tree swings into action when the boy returns and wants "some money." Needed once again, the tree obliges. The tree is happy—another perfect fantasy for the apple-taker who can meet his needs without ever incurring opposition, argument, friction of any kind. On and on it goes. The boy wants a house. Fine. Take my branches. The tree, although denuded in a rather major way, is happy. The boy, of course, stays away for a long time. (I dare say he never writes.) But the tree stands firm. She is beside herself when the boy returns. The man is old and sad. Take my trunk, sail away, be happy.

A little bit of sadness enters at last. The tree isn't really happy. The reader perks up. Perhaps the tree has at least realized that this relationship is entirely one-sided, not that of a parent to a child in a realistic and decent and loving relationship, but that of a fantasized maternal figure to a narcissistic child in a relationship that is riddled with plenty of passive-aggressive nonsense. Why is the tree sad? Because it has nothing left to give.

The boy, now an old man, sans wife or children or any evidence of having lived a life, returns to the maternal tree/stump and sits. The tree is happy at last. In an odd way, the tree is victorious—she has the boy with her and they are both wrecks but they are together—but it is a pernicious sort of victory, bought at the expense of her "treeness" and the boy's humanness. This isn't a happy story. It's a sappy one. And it has nothing to do with *caritas* or *agape* either, for that matter.

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Richard John Neuhaus

At the end, the tree is a stump, but she is not stumped. As a member of the genus tree, the end is melancholy, she is not flourishing. But as *this* tree defined by her love for *this* boy, all is well.

And the boy, who on the face of it seems awfully selfish, loved the tree. Very much, we are told. There was a forest, so there must have been many other trees, but he always came back to, played with, swung on, climbed up, and slept under *this* tree. Even when he is an old man he is still called "the boy," which may indicate that he never grew up. Or maybe that he never outgrew his love for the tree, to whom he was always "Boy."

After we are told that the boy loved the tree very much and that the tree was happy, we come to this, "But time went by." Before that, all is idyllic and love is wondrously reciprocated; up to now the narrative is a succession of "and," "and," "and." Now comes the "but" of time's testing. "But time went by." The boy has another love, while the tree has but one. Perhaps "Y.L.," his other love, was an abiding love, even his wife (he takes the initials with him on the boat); perhaps not. It may be the tree was jealous of Y.L.—two leaves fall like tears when the boy lies with her in the shade.

I do not think the tree was jealous. Two things are necessary to the tree's happiness, the presence of the boy and the ability to give him what he needs. The latter is more necessary than the former. The boy says, "I want," "I want," "I want." The tree (unwisely?) interprets his wants as needs and, in meeting them, tells him each time that he will then be happy. We don't know whether the tree believed that he would be happy or was just encouraging him to be. When it comes to taking her trunk for the boat, she says, "Then you can sail away . . . and be happy." The ellipsis is important, I think, indicating a doubt on the tree's part as to whether the boy would ever be happy.

We are never told whether the boy was happy, but there is a kind of resigned contentment at the end. All along, the tree, taking the boy's wants to be his needs, was able to meet them; and the fittingness of things continues to the end when the boy neither wants nor needs what the tree cannot give, but needs what the tree can give, "a quiet place to sit and rest." It is the first time the boy speaks of what he needs rather than of what he wants, suggesting that he has arrived at a measure of wisdom.

All in all, the boy's was not a happy life, it seems. After that fateful line, "But time went by," we see him smile only once, and it is a rather desperate smile as he runs off with the branches, filled with ambitious plans for wife and family and goodness knows what else. But the boy found happiness in the tree, and in the love of the tree—hers for him and his for her. He did not just come back to ask for things. He came back to visit with the tree. When you visit with someone whom you love, you talk, inter alia, about your troubles and dreams. On each visit, the tree wants them to do together what they had done before, before "time went by." The tree wants it to be the way it was, but the exigencies of the boy force the tree to move on, to discover new ways to give, new ways to be happy.

There is another noteworthy ellipsis. After the boy has taken the trunk for the boat we read, "And the tree was happy . . . but not really." It is not just the act of giving that makes her happy. It is giving within the hope of continuing love, giving within the hope of being able to give again. She is not really happy because it seems probable the boy will never come back, and because she has nothing else to give. But the boy does come back, and the tree discovers that she does have something more to give, and it is just what the boy needs. And it is all that the boy will need. There is no anxiety about whether she has more to give, nor about whether the boy will be there. He will stay as long as he can, as long as he is. So this time we read, without ellipsis, "and the tree was happy."

Each time the tree had made a proposal to the boy, she told him that he would then be happy. But not at the end. It's just, "Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest." No promise that he would be happy. But maybe he was, or at least happier than before, now that he is no longer filled with wants. "I don't need very much now," he says.

The stump straightened herself up as much as she could, and she was happy. As a general thing called "tree," she was greatly diminished; as *this* tree loving *this* boy, all was well. Of course the boy will not be around very long, while the tree will. Trees, even trees that are stumps, last much longer than boys. As time went by, and the boy was no longer there, was she happy in remembering the happiness that was theirs? Or did she regret that she gave so much? If she still had her trunk and her branches and her leaves and her apples, she could have befriended another boy and started up all over again. In that event, however, she would not have been this tree.

The story is not about a tree and a boy. It is about this boy's tree and this tree's boy, and the ways of their loving, the ways of their belonging to one another, as time went by. FT

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The Challenge of the Catechism

Avery Dulles

I

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the boldest challenge yet offered to the cultural relativism that currently threatens to erode the contents of Catholic faith. According to a widely prevalent view, religious truth consists in an ineffable encounter with the transcendent. This encounter may be expressed in symbols and metaphors, but it cannot be communicated by propositional language, since it utterly surpasses the reach of human concepts. All statements about revelation, moreover, are said to be so culturally conditioned that they cannot be transferred from one age or one cultural region to another. Every theological affirmation that comes to us from the past must be examined with suspicion because it was formulated in a situation differing markedly from our own. Each constituency must reexperience the revelation of God and find language and other symbolic forms appropriate to itself.

Mystical empiricism of this type inevitably devalues specific beliefs. It makes light of the efforts of previous generations to formulate the faith in creedal and dogmatic assertions. In this perspective the traditional view that a dogma is a divinely revealed truth is no longer taken seriously. The struggle to maintain doctrinal consensus in the universal Church is viewed as a threat to the creativity of local churches.

This sophisticated relativism, widespread though it may be among intellectuals, has had only limited impact on the mass of the Catholic faithful and is firmly rejected by the hierarchical leadership of the Church. Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who are the intellectual equals of any other religious thinkers of our day, have consistently opposed this trend. In their view divine revelation can be formulated, at least in part, in irrevocably and universally true creedal and dogmatic propositions. Recognizing the need to defend the doctrinal patrimony of the Church from present-day skepticism and relativism, many leaders of the Church became convinced that the time had come for a new universal catechism.

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II

The last officially authorized catechism for the universal Church had been the Roman Catechism produced in 1566, just after the Council of Trent. The intention of Vatican I (1869-1870) to commission a brief catechism was never brought to a definitive vote, because the Council was interrupted by war and indefinitely prorogued. At Vatican II (1962-1965) some of the fathers, including Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, argued in favor of a compendium of all Catholic doctrine, but the Council contented itself with prescribing a "general catechetical directory," which was duly issued in 1971.

The publication of *De Nieuwe Katechismus* by the Dutch bishops in 1966 raised serious questions. Some maintained that the best response to the ambiguities and omissions detected in that volume would be a new catechism for the universal Church, but many believed that the time was not ripe for such a project. The Holy See in 1968 therefore issued only a set of amendments to be incorporated into the Dutch catechism.

At the Synod of Bishops in 1974, dedicated to the theme of evangelization, the Polish language group, including Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, spoke in favor of a universal catechism, but the proposal was not accepted at that time. At the Synod of 1977, on "catechesis in our time," a number of bishops proposed a catechism

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that would be normative for the universal Church, but there was no unanimity regarding the nature or desirability of such a work. The Synod therefore made no recommendation on the subject.

The call for a universal catechism received much greater support at the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. Celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II, bishops from all over the world were summoned to consider the interpretation and impact of the Council. In their preparatory reports for this Synod, several of the episcopal conferences had already called for a universal catechism. At the Synod itself, the bishops noted a regrettable tendency to play off the pastoral against the doctrinal import of the Council and to overlook the continuity between the teaching of the Council and previous authoritative statements. In recommending a universal catechism, Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston, directly challenged the thesis that the current need was for greater decentralization. He asserted:

> I propose a Commission of Cardinals to prepare a draft of a Conciliar Catechism to be promulgated by the Holy Father after consulting the bishops of the world. In a shrinking world—a global village—national catechisms will not fill the current need for a clear articulation of the Church's faith.

This proposal was then taken up by several other Synod fathers, including an archbishop from Burundi, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, the Archbishop of Dakar, and the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy, Silvio Oddi. After favorable reception in many of the language groups (*circuli minores*), the proposal found its way into the Final Report of the Synod, which declared:

> There is a strong general desire that a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine be drawn up, as regards both faith and morals, in order to serve as a point of reference for catechisms and compendiums prepared in different regions. The presentation of doctrine must be biblical and liturgical, offering sound doctrine while being at the same time adapted to the life of Christians today.

In his closing address of December 7, 1985, the Pope indicated his satisfaction with this suggestion.

III

Not surprisingly, reformist theologians considered the project ill-advised. In an article published in the international review *Concilium* in 1989, Herbert Vorgrimler, a distinguished disciple of Karl Rahner, pointed out the tensions involved in the mandate. He particularly attacked the assumption

> that there can be something like a *fixed, unchangeable "deposit" of teaching of faith and morals* which "in itself" has never been affected by history and may not be affected by transmission in the processes of inculturation. It is easy to see why this idea is very seductive, since it guarantees firm ground under the feet, in the heads, and in the mouths of preachers and teachers in any conceivable situation in which the Church may find itself. However, it is more problematic than is realized or admitted, because it conceives of this "deposit" on the model of Platonic ideas, and does not allow for essential features of Christianity such as the *history of dogma* and its understanding.

After raising a number of further questions about the desirability and possibility of the new catechism, Vorgrimler concluded: "If the work is started with a serious programme, . . . it is clear that it will not be completed either in this pontificate or in the next."

Two years later *Concilium* followed up Vorgrimler's article on the catechism with a whole volume, which echoed and even enlarged upon the previous criticisms. In their introduction to the volume the editors, Johann-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, expressed agreement with those who reject "the notion of a deposit of faith transcending history and culture and notionally precedent to all inculturation." David Tracy, in his essay for this volume, wrote: "The hope for an adequate 'world catechism' seems, at best, illusory." He predicted that the catechism would be an example of "unwelcome and unacknowledged Eurocentrism in a polycentric world church." In another contribution Metz himself, echoing Vorgrimler's complaints, warned against "official centralism as a defensive protection for unity" and against the illusion of a "fixed and unchangeable 'deposit' of doctrinal teaching" subsisting in some Platonic world of ideas.

Other contributors to the same volume objected that the catechism was unnecessary. According to Hermann Häring, the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, and the creed are sufficient as binding elements safeguarding the common faith. "If these elements are interpreted on the basis of the experience of Jesus and applied to present-day experience, and if they are constantly being understood afresh, they are more than enough for unity and peace." Still later in the volume another contributor, Emilio Alberich, warned that the universal catechism could be an obstacle to the successful inculturation of the faith. With some understatement he remarked that "experts and researchers in catechetics have not received the proposal of a universal catechism with much enthusiasm."

Notwithstanding the opposition, preparations went ahead. On June 10, 1986, the Pope assigned the task to an international commission of twelve cardi-

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nals and archbishops, with Joseph Ratzinger as president. This committee was assisted by an editorial committee of seven bishops, one each from Spain, Italy, France, England, the United States, Chile, and Argentina, and by a Maronite priest working in Lebanon who was an expert on Eastern theology. Christoph Schönborn, O.P. (now Auxiliary Bishop of Vienna), was appointed editorial secretary.

The editorial committee, acting on instructions from the papal commission, drew up an outline that was reviewed by the commission in May 1987. With the collaboration of many theologians, an "advance draft" of the entire work was completed in December 1987 and was considered by the commission in May 1988. A second draft was prepared for discussion by the commission in February 1989. In November 1989 a "revised draft" or "provisional text" was sent out to all the bishops' conferences in the world for comments and criticisms by the bishops. About 1,000 replies were sent in, containing some 24,000 suggested changes. While requesting many improvements, the great majority of the bishops were satisfied with the revised draft as the basis for a definitive text.

A number of theologians gained access to the provisional text of 1989 and voiced their criticisms, predictably negative. Nicholas Lash, writing for the London *Tablet*, recommended that the draft be rejected, even as a basis for discussion. He added that the Synod of Bishops, at a future meeting, should reconsider the advisability of the whole project. Richard McBrien, with great assurance, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: "The project should be abandoned." Thomas J. Reese spoke for many progressive theologians when he wrote, in his introduction to a volume of essays on the provisional text:

> In my opinion the document needs to be totally rewritten. It cannot be saved by amendments that only tinker with the text. If this were a draft submitted to an ecumenical council, it would deserve an overwhelming *"non placet"* from the bishops. It is questionable whether a universal catechism is needed at all and whether the papal commission can write one that fulfills the criteria of being faithful to Vatican II or useful for the Church.

IV

Following the desires of the large majority of the bishops, the commission decided to rework the existing text, taking the criticisms into account. In the revision much greater attention was paid to the hierarchy of truths, so that the reader would never lose sight of the central mystery of faith—the triune God who calls us to communion with himself. The biblical citations were carefully reviewed by Scripture scholars to make sure that they were appropriate. It was decided to abandon any effort to describe specific non-Christians religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Greater emphasis was placed on the positive relations between Christianity and Judaism and on ecumenical relations with other Christian churches and communities. A new section was introduced on states of life within the Church: hierarchy, laity, and consecrated life. Greater emphasis was placed on the vocation of all the baptized to holiness. In the revision of the treatise on Christian conduct, the commandments were more clearly presented as developments of the twofold precept of love of God and neighbor. The links between observance of the law and the practice of evangelical perfection were clarified. Greater attention was paid to the social doctrine of the Church. The epilogue on the Lord's Prayer was expanded into a full-scale treatment of Christian prayer. Vast improvements were made in the style and presentation, so that the choppy first version was turned into a polished text that, for the most part, is pleasing to read.

The final text was approved by the commission and submitted to the Pope on February 14, 1992. The Pope gave his approval on June 25, 1992, and in an apostolic constitution of October 11, 1992, significantly entitled *Fidei depositum*, declared the Catechism to be "a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for the teaching of the faith."

Reflecting on the process by which the Catechism was produced, Cardinal Ratzinger has written:

> It is still a sort of wonder to me that a readable, for the most part intrinsically unified, and, in my opinion, beautiful book arose out of such a complex editorial process. The constant growth of unanimity among such different minds as were represented in the editorial committee and in the commission was for me, and for all those who took part in the project, a magnificent experience in which we often believed that we felt a higher hand guiding us.

The published text, in many languages, has been a remarkable commercial success. A document initially directed to bishops (paragraph 12), and only through them to religious educators and others, the Catechism has proved to be exceedingly popular with lay readers. More than a million copies were sold in France; more than two million have been sold within the first few months in the United States. Some people are speaking of the "phenomenon" of the Catechism: it evidently responds to a deep hunger in the people of God for the bread of solid doctrine.

V

In spite of some opinions to the contrary, then, the Catechism does respond to a felt need. Although Paul VI could in some sense rightly say that Vatican

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II was the great catechism of our time, the Council did not organize its teaching in a systematic way. Besides, it left many important doctrines untreated. After the Council, therefore, questions were raised as to whether the teaching of previous popes and councils on these untouched issues were still in force. Had they been quietly abrogated by the Council's silence?

The Catechism sets forth the whole body of Catholic teaching in an organic manner. It is a serene, comprehensive presentation of the authoritative teaching of Scripture and Catholic tradition, systematically distributed in four parts dealing respectively with the creed, the sacraments, Christian conduct, and prayer. These parts are broken down into familiar divisions: the twelve articles of the creed, the seven sacraments, the ten commandments, and the seven petitions of the Our Father. The Catechism as a whole is a magnificent panorama, breathtaking in its scope. Where else could one find between two covers a digest of the full teaching of the Church, down through the ages, about almost any conceivable point from the dogma of the Trinity to the morality of gambling? As a catechism should, the book concentrates on doctrine, set forth in a clear and orderly manner. Yet the presentation is free from the subtle and technical distinctions characteristic of Scholasticism. Closely packed with information, it is unencumbered by professional jargon and therefore accessible to a wide public.

While preeminently concerned with truth, the book is no mere head trip. It speaks to the heart, eliciting prayer and devotion. Although the creed skips from the birth of Jesus to his passion and death, the Catechism inserts at this point a section on the mysteries of the life of Jesus, in which the inner mystery of his incarnate existence radiates with captivating power. Devotion to Mary, which permeates the entire Catechism, is treated most explicitly in the article on the communion of saints. Many other doctrinal sections, such as the presentation of the symbols of the Holy Spirit, invite the reader to meditation. The authors have drawn liberally on liturgical texts and have incorporated moving passages from the ancient fathers and medieval and modern saints and mystics. In these selections, care has been taken to draw from Eastern as well as Western sources, and the voices of women as well as men are heard.

VI

An unexpected bonus is the aesthetic quality of the book, which as a whole is admirably proportioned, so it rises like a vast basilica over the ground it covers. It maintains a clear focus: the mystery of the eternal Father who blesses the world by sending the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of the four major parts is introduced by a color-plated reproduction of an ancient fresco, sculpture, or miniature. The text dwells on the capacity of beauty to evoke the sense of the divine. Following the Book of Wisdom, it remarks on the beauty of the world as evidence that the Creator is supremely beautiful:

> Even before revealing himself to man in words of truth, God reveals himself to him through the universal language of creation, the work of his Word, of his wisdom: the order and harmony of the cosmos—which both the child and the scientist discover—"from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator," "for the author of beauty created them." (2500)

The Catechism quotes St. Augustine:

> Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air distending and diffusing itself, question the beauty of the sky . . . question all these realities. All respond: "See, we are beautiful." Their beauty is a profession [*confessio*]. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One [*Pulcher*] who is not subject to change? (32)

In keeping with this approach, the Catechism calls attention to the beauty and love visible in Christ, who "reflects the glory of God" (2501, quoting Hebrews 1:3). Great importance is attached to the symbolism in the mysteries of the life of Jesus and to the symbolic forms under which the Holy Spirit has been made known to us. In expounding the ingredients of sacramental worship, the Catechism brings out the communicative power of signs and symbols taken from nature, from human culture, and from sacred history, including especially the actions and career of Jesus. The symbolism of baptism, for instance, is powerfully conveyed by the following passage from St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

> Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. . . . It is called *gift* because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; *grace* since it is given even to the guilty; *Baptism* because sin is buried in the water; *anointing* for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; *enlightenment* because it radiates light; *clothing* since it veils our shame; *bath* because it washes; and *seal* as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship. (1216)

In the treatment of liturgical song, the Catechism quotes an eloquent passage from Augustine on the tears of devotion with which as a neophyte he heard the hymnody in the Catholic Church (1157). St. John Damascene is invoked as a witness to the way in which the beauty of holy images can assist Christian prayer and contemplation (1162). The treatment of

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the eighth commandment ("You shall not bear false witness"), after dealing at some length with truth in communications, ends rather surprisingly but gratifyingly with a plea for the promotion of sacred art in the Church (2502-3).

Readers of the Catechism are introduced to God not only as the source of all beauty but as the absolute and immutable reality from whom all truth and goodness flow forth. Truth, we are reminded, is beautiful in itself; it carries with it the joy and splendor of spiritual beauty (2500). As sovereign truth, God alone fully satisfies the mind's quest for explanation and meaning. Being truth itself, God cannot deceive. In giving us intelligence and a capacity for truth, he orders us to himself. The added light of revelation, far from impeding the human quest for understanding, assists the mind to escape from its own darkness.

Goodness, which ranks with beauty and truth as the third transcendental, is the attractiveness and beneficence of being. As the fullness of being, God is supremely lovable and supremely loving. Creation is attributed to the generosity of divine love, which wills to share its own goodness. Human beings are primary recipients of God's blessings. Fashioned in the image and likeness of God, they are called to participate forever in the divine life. On this point the Catechism recalls the words of St. Catherine of Siena:

> What made you establish man in so great a dignity? With unimaginable love you have looked upon your creatures within yourself! You have fallen in love with them; for by love you created them, and by love you have given them a being capable of tasting your eternal Goodness. (356)

From this vision of reality it follows that the supreme calling of every human being is to love God in return and to live according to the law of love. All the commandments of God and of the Church are traced back to the twofold precept of love, which Jesus himself quoted from the Jewish Torah. The core of Christian morality is the new law of the gospel, infused into human hearts by the Holy Spirit. Christ is in his own person the way of perfection (1952). The beatitudes, which stand at the beginning of this section of the Catechism, are said to "depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity" (1717). They point forward to the blessedness so aptly described by Augustine: "There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and praise. Behold what will be at the end without end. For what other end do we have, if not to reach the kingdom which has no end?" (1720)

A remarkable feature of the Catechism is the extent to which the treatment of the Church, the sacraments, morality, and prayer are permeated by references to Christ and the Holy Spirit. The entire Christian life is presented as a response to the gift and call of God—a response made possible by faith and the sacraments. The commandments do not appear as external impositions but as consequences that flow connaturally from membership in the people of the New Covenant (2062). In the New Covenant, "prayer is *Christian* insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body" (2565). The Lord's Prayer is characterized, in Tertullian's admirable phrase, as "the summary of the whole gospel" (2761).

In giving these brief glimpses into the new Catechism I hope to have shown that it is not at all the kind of work that would be expected to spring from the heads of arid bureaucrats, anxious to defend their own authority. The authors have faithfully carried out their mandate to produce a work that would be biblical and liturgical in tone rather than legalistic or scholastic. As Ratzinger rightly claims, the Catechism is not ecclesiocentric; it is centered on God, who freely and lovingly turns to us by sending us his Son to be our brother and his Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Having this focus, it manifests and evokes heartfelt praise, which at times rises almost to the pitch of ecstasy. It is a book to be read in small sections and savored in a leisurely way.

VII

In referring to the "challenge" of the Catechism, as I do in my title, I do not mean to suggest that it is a contentious piece of work. On the contrary, it is calm and irenic. In gathering up the doctrinal patrimony of Catholic Christianity the Catechism does not add to the burden of belief; it leaves the individual doctrines with the same authority they had before the Catechism was written. The Catechism refrains from polemics; it does not refute or condemn adversaries, nor is it defensive in tone. It contains only a few apologetical sections, and these, printed in small type, are evidently intended to help the reader understand the Church's positions rather than to convince the unbeliever.

For all that, the Catechism does issue some real challenges. By confidently setting forth what the Church has taught down through the centuries, the Catechism by implication takes on modern scholars who have criticized the inherited patrimony on the basis of new methodologies in exegesis, historical research, and epistemology. The challenges may be seen as directed against four very popular tendencies: positivist exegesis, historicist dogmatics, revisionist speculation, and experience-based catechetics. The challenges, of course, are mutual, since the Catechism is challenged by those it challenges.

VIII

With regard to exegesis, there are those who would have liked the Catechism to analyze the

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biblical texts in their own context, without reference to the doctrinal tradition. But the Catechism takes a different path. Following Vatican II, it affirms that Scripture should be read as an inspired document, in the framework of the Church's faith. The effort to read Scripture by a positivistic use of historical-critical tools, while it may be useful up to a point, can lead to impasses, such as the dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

This doctrinal approach is not rejected by all biblical experts. A distinguished Old Testament scholar, Joseph Jensen, O.S.B., concedes that the Catechism's approach might strike some readers, accustomed to the historical-critical method, as uncritical. But he rejects the charge on several grounds. The Catechism is entitled to speak from the perspective of Christian faith, which it intends to affirm. Its emphasis on the typological meanings of the Old Testament, moreover, accords well with the use of the Old Testament in the New. Furthermore, modern developments in hermeneutics suggest that the Catechism is on target. A classic text, even one that is not divinely inspired, contains depths of meaning that escape the original author and appear only in the light of later reflection.

A New Testament scholar, Luke Timothy Johnson, is equally affirming. After remarking that the Catechism almost totally bypasses critical biblical scholarship, he registers no regrets, "for truth to tell, the contributions of critical biblical scholarship either to real history or to authentic theology have not up to now been particularly impressive and have certainly not had the character of transmitting faith to succeeding generations."

The Catechism does not deny, but on the contrary affirms, the value of textual and historical criticism. Its authors were quite aware that the literal meaning of many key texts from Scripture is debated among exegetes of different schools. Since the Church generally refrains from taking official positions on matters of technical exegesis, such as dating, authorship, and literary dependence, the Catechism leaves scholars free to take their own positions. Biblical experts were nevertheless consulted to make sure that the assertions are not based on faulty readings or indefensible interpretations.

The Catechism makes no claim that the biblical texts it cites are proofs of the Church's doctrine. Rather, they are seen as indications pointing toward what the Church, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, has come to see in the course of centuries. Often enough the biblical grounding consists in the convergence of many texts, no one of which is decisive in itself.

IX

Professional historians of dogma have a concern similar to that of technical exegetes. Some of them are unhappy that the Catechism, while quoting from ancient documents, has failed to indicate the context in which these pronouncements were made. But a catechism, by its very nature, must expound Church teaching in a systematic, rather than a historical, order. In so doing, it brings together statements that have been made in different situations and different periods of history. Occasionally, where the stages of development are especially important, the Catechism supplies concise historical expositions in small type. But this historical information is not allowed to interfere with the primary task of the Catechism, which is to set forth the resultant doctrines rather than to trace the process of their formation. The Catechism does not purport to do the work of a course in historical theology.

By gathering up statements from different ages, the Catechism implicitly teaches that the truths of Christian faith are not time-bound. The questions addressed by past popes and councils are still with us: Does God involve himself in human history? Is Jesus the eternal Son of the eternal Father? Did he rise in body from the dead? Generally speaking, the answers given to these and other questions in the creeds and dogmas of the Church are still intelligible to us—more so, frequently, than the speculations of contemporary theologians, who insist on the necessity of novel formulations.

While its teaching can be differently expressed in different ages, the Church cannot disavow its apostolic foundations and its own doctrinal commitments. The revelation, permanently given in Christ, has been authoritatively mediated by Scripture and tradition. The concept of a "deposit of faith," so irksome to the progressivist mentality, is authentically biblical and Christian. Christianity would dissolve itself if it allowed its revealed content, handed down in tradition, to be replaced by contemporary theories.

X

Some systematic theologians, reviewing the Catechism, have expressed their disappointment that it does not endorse speculative positions that they personally espouse. Here again, the question to be asked is whether these positions belong in a catechism. Do they represent the received doctrine of the Church? As Schönborn remarks with reference to the descent of Christ into hell, "New interpretations, such as that of a Hans Urs von Balthasar (the contemplation of Holy Saturday), however profound and helpful they may be, have not yet experienced that reception which would justify their inclusion in the Catechism."

The doctrine of original sin caused particular difficulty, and was studied at length by a special commission. In the past fifty years numerous theologians have proposed ways of updating the traditional

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teaching, which relied heavily on contestable interpretations of the creation narratives in Genesis and of Paul's letter to the Romans. Like many modern theologians the Catechism interprets original sin in a Christological framework as the "reverse side" of redemption (389), but, unlike some, it adheres for the most part to the Augustinian positions that have long been dominant in the West and that were reaffirmed by Paul VI in a speech of 1966. As Schönborn says in this connection, "It cannot be the task of the Catechism to represent novel theories which do not belong to the assured patrimony of the faith." A close reading of the Catechism shows that the authors were aware of the figurative language of the biblical accounts and do not impose a literalist understanding of the Genesis stories about Adam and Eve. It remains the task of religious educators and theologians to show how certain traditional formulations, repeated in the Catechism, may be subject to reinterpretation in the light of modern science and exegesis.

XI

Religious educators, in assessing the Catechism, articulate two major concerns. First, some of them feel that a universal catechism by its very nature inhibits the freedom of local churches to adapt the presentation of the faith to the needs of their own region. Conscious of this objection, the authors of the Catechism explicitly declare that the methods and presentation of doctrine must be adjusted according to the "culture, age, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition" of different audiences. This adaptation is to be made by particular catechisms and teachers of religion, using the present catechism only as a point of reference (24). In promulgating the Catechism, John Paul II cautioned that it was not intended to replace approved local catechisms, "which take into account various situations and cultures, while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine." Cardinal Ratzinger was even more specific:

> Making the content of catechesis more intelligible, while respecting the organic and hierarchical character of Christian truths; deepening and broadening the themes only sketched; expressing them in a language more fitted to the times and more close to the integral richness of the faith; proclaiming the assertions of faith in a way that is more faithful and more attentive to the exigencies, the expectations, and the problematics of those being addressed: these are only some of the tasks that await those who undertake the work of catechetical proclamation, in their indispensable work of inculturating the faith in general and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in particular.

Faithful adherence to Catholic doctrine has always been a high priority, but is especially urgent in our day, when ideas that originate in any locality travel with the speed of light across the face of the globe. The bishops at the synod of 1985, though they came from all parts of the world, did not clamor for greater regional autonomy. On the contrary, they regarded a unified compendium of Catholic doctrine as a necessary help for maintaining the unity of the Church's faith in the "global village," which the world is now becoming.

The second point raised by many religious educators is that experience, rather than established doctrine, should provide the starting point. The commission responsible for the Catechism carefully considered the possibility of beginning with a description of contemporary human experience, but it eventually decided that this point of departure would be too arbitrary, depending on the angle of vision selected. Contemporary experience, they concluded, is too various and ephemeral to offer a solid platform that would apply today and tomorrow, in New York and Madagascar, Bangladesh and Moscow. The decision was accordingly made to keep the focus on the Church's patrimony of faith. Nevertheless the Catechism does begin inductively with a description of how the search for God arises out of common human experience. The method is not a pure deductive intellectualism.

Nothing in the Catechism prevents the religious educator from seeking points of insertion for Christian doctrine in the actual experience of men and women today. But the Catechism constitutes a challenge to any method that would reduce faith to personal experience. No analysis of contemporary experience can by itself disclose the contents of Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection, which are known only from revelation. Cardinal Ratzinger rightly finds fault with a kind of "theological empiricism" in which present-day experience is allowed to block the dynamism of the original sources. Speaking of certain European catechetical programs, he remarks that they emphasize experience and method to the detriment of faith and content. Such instruction, he observes, has proved itself incapable of arousing interest. The word of God must be allowed to shine forth again as a power of salvation. The truths of revelation must be presented in their organic unity, apart from which they can seem meaningless.

A prominent American religious educator, Francis D. Kelly, speaks in similar terms. He characterizes the new Catechism as "a clarion call for catechesis to refocus clearly on the objective mystery of faith, on its doctrinal, moral, and ascetical content, as the most solid and fruitful foundation for building the faith community." Catechists, he goes on to say, "need to recapture this sense of mission and confidence if they are going to be effective in our culture."

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The Christian faith does not need to be made interesting by sophisticated pedagogical techniques. If allowed to present itself in all its splendor and depth, it seizes the hearts of all who have ears to listen. Although the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is not a perfect book, the symphony of faith does echo through its pages. To be carried away by that symphony we have only to drop our resistances, allow the book to deliver its message, and let it change our points of view.

The Catechism should not be seen as a burden or a fetter. It does not purport to give the final, definitive word on all the questions it treats. Indeed, it explicitly encourages exegetes, theologians, and religious educators to go beyond it in exercising the skills of their respective disciplines. But it reminds them to take cognizance of the great heritage that the Church transmits to us. As a reliable compendium of Catholic doctrine, the Catechism brings together the wisdom of the centuries in an appealing synthesis. By virtue of its consistency, beauty, and spiritual power, it offers a veritable feast of faith. FT

Recycling Christmas

Most of its dry needles lost with star
and spheres and angels, the tree we children dragged
the short way to the bonfire, tossed
crushed boxes, giftwrap on the pyre,
handfuls of snow so flames would crackle,
dart up the night to warm
our last caroling circle of the season—
a fragrant burning splendor.

In middle age we fed our mulcher
limb by limb our Christmas trees
drawn and quartered even to the trunk.
Wasting nothing, we husbanded our joys,
returned them layer by layer to earth.

And now grown smaller by Nativities,
our family watches the evening
caretaker wheel our smaller tree
away for curbside pick-up—a harvesting
of still green conifers
bound for lakes as habitats for fish,
for sudden darting, gleaming Chrismons
rippling dark branches in January waters.

Noreen Hayes

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Natural Law and a Nihilistic Culture

Carl F. H. Henry

The term natural law is used to mean a body of ethical imperatives supposedly inherent in human beings and discovered by human reason. It therefore differs from statute law, from supernaturally revealed law, and even from so-called "laws of nature."

The word "natural" is, of course, highly ambiguous. Even "natural law" has been defined in various ways; it now means different things to different people. Some find the notion lacking in precise content. Others say natural law changes with an evolving society. Others distinguish between "good and bad natural laws."

What natural law theory essentially opposes is the notion that moral law is subjective, evolutionary, pragmatic, or existential. What it excludes is a distillation of moral law from the transcendent supernatural, that is, from divine revelation. What it affirms is that all human beings share a set of ethical norms and imperatives that they commonly perceive without dependence on supernatural disclosure and illumination. Humanity, in short, universally knows a body of morally binding laws that shape a common pattern of social behavior, and moreover knows these imperatives without reference to transcendent revelation.

Any case for natural law must therefore be made on natural foundations and independently of supernatural considerations.

Natural law theory has in modern times come under spirited attack, but the Roman Catholic Church remains a most vigorous champion. It has been said, quite properly, that without an appeal to natural law, virtually the entire spectrum of Catholic moral theory would lose force.

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Objections to natural law theory are several and varied: that all authentic law is divine, that all law is positive law (that is, established by the state), that law is culture-conditioned tradition, that law is evolutionary, that law is utilitarian, that law is merely the self-interest of the mighty, or contrariwise, that it is the invention of the weak. Assuredly not all these conflicting objections can be valid. Proponents of natural law dismiss all of them as groundless.

Thomas Aquinas is considered the classic proponent of Christian natural law theory, while Protestant Reformers, especially Calvin and Luther, are usually considered its main opponents.

Protestant critics contend that the derivation of natural law from what is inherent in human nature implies that God and the supernatural are irrelevant to moral knowledge, and moreover that the theory does not take sufficient cognizance of the epistemic impact of sin upon the life of man.

The Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), regarded as the father of international law, drew from the theory of the independence of natural law the inference that it would be valid "even if God did not exist." In our own generation Paul Sieghart argues from the fact that contemporary political documents carefully stipulate international human rights to the view that no need therefore exists for "systems of *divine or natural* law" since "recourse is no longer necessary to the Creator or to Nature, or to belief in either of them." Thus rationalism exploits a suspended appeal to the supernatural by formulating a case for human rights and duties without any reference either to God or to natural law.

Recent ecumenical conferences have endeavored to narrow Protestant-Catholic differences over natural law. Some participants have argued that the Reformers in fact supported natural law, or that they advanced a different variety of it. William Klempa surveys twentieth-century scholarship on the issue of

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natural law in Calvin and declares it "a major battleground." One main group of Calvin interpreters contends that natural law has no place in Calvin's teaching; another, that his ethical, political, and social views are rooted in a natural law view.

Even some scholars specializing in Protestant Reformation studies have advanced the notion that the Reformers endorsed natural law. John T. McNeill finds in them "no real discontinuity" with a natural law emphasis. Except possibly for Zwingli, he concludes, the Reformers accept natural law and even consider it affirmed by Scripture. "The assumption of some contemporary theologians that natural law has no place in the company of Reformation theology," he asserts, "cannot be allowed to govern historical inquiry or to lead us to ignore, minimize, or evacuate of reality the positive utterances on law scattered through the works of the Reformers." R. C. Sproul argues that evangelical interpreters have misunderstood Calvin, and he insists that the Reformer affirms natural law.

Lutheran scholar Carl Braaten emphasizes that there are diverse formulations of natural law and that Protestant criticism has been directed especially against the Thomistic view, whereas natural law theory need not be correlated with "the medieval Thomistic-Aristotelian synthesis." Braaten insists that "the pressure to abandon the teaching of natural law did not stem from the Reformation so much as from post-Enlightenment developments in philosophy, especially utilitarianism and positivism." Braaten thinks that ecumenical dialogue on natural law is especially needed today to confront current philosophical deconstructionism, which degrades meaning and truth as the creative imposition of the knowing subject. He calls for a rehabilitation of reason, all the more important since appeals to reason are now readily dismissed as historically conditioned. The Reformation did not bar the door, he emphasizes, "to every kind of natural theology, natural law, and rational morality."

Yet evangelical Reformed scholars are in the main unimpressed by the effort to channel the Reformation in support of natural law. Judged by the history of thought, some suggest, the verdict that Calvin taught natural law theory is as surprising and as unjustifiable as Hans Küng's contention that Calvin held the Roman Catholic version of justification. Those who seek to catholicize Calvin, they insist, fail to plot accurately the distinctions the Reformer makes. Braaten sees no necessary opposition between evangelical affirmation and an appeal to universal justice and morality to which all have access through reason and conscience. But natural law involves more than that.

The issues at stake are of fundamental importance. Modernity substitutes political consensus for divine moral law, whereas natural law theory holds political consensus answerable to universal norms. Despite its naturalistic stance, modernity seeks, unavailingly, to find some semblance of transcendent anchorage, or metaphysical linkage, however vague, that will escape complete subjectivism or relativism in ethics. Yet the contemporary spirit seems unable to achieve intellectual justification for the universal validity of all, or any, moral commitments. The concept of a mega-truth or a mega-good—some transcendent network to which truth claims and ethical claims are linked—is precluded both by the naturalistic reduction of reality to impersonal processes and by the postmodern disavowal of objective meaning, objective truth, and objective good.

Not only for the intellectual elite but increasingly for popular culture also, truth and right reflect only a synthesis of empirically observed relationships; they are unanchored in a transcendently based authority and require no reference to an eternal supernatural God. However exacting modern empirical methods claim to be, they cannot for all that attain to the unrevisability of divine attributes. Neither a cosmos-centered nor a human-centered worldview can transcend space-time relativities. If the universe is only a theater for human relationships of power, human reasoning even at best cannot identify universally valid norms or transcend fallible approximations of any perfect standard. The greatest appeal of natural law theory lies in the claim that it mirrors universally shared norms and moral principles that lift humanity above modern subjectivism and relativism. Yet the Reformers in principle questioned the epistemic viability of natural law theory, whether stated in pre-Christian Greco-Roman terms or on premises pursued by Thomas Aquinas. The Reformers do have a doctrine of transcendent and universal morality, but it is based on different foundations. Upon the resolution of this conflict may well turn the moral fortunes of the Western world, and beyond that, ultimately, the entire planet.

If natural law controversy has turned the philosophical arena into a battleground, over what issues is the battle joined? What are the central features of natural law theory as Thomas Aquinas sketched them, and what essentially is the response of critics?

The three contentions of the Thomist doctrine of natural law that evoke evangelical criticism are: (1) that independently of divine revelation, (2) there exists a universally shared body or system of moral beliefs, (3) that human reasoning articulates despite the noetic consequences of the Adamic fall.

Calvin's view differs from that of Thomas in at least three respects. He teaches that (1) the law of nature is grounded in divine revelation and does not exist independently; (2) it is innately bestowed at man's creation and is prephilosophical and not derived from observation and experience; (3) it does not

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survive in human knowledge as a universally shared system of truth and morality but, while maintaining man's accountability, is fragmented due to the repellent intervention of sin.

Christianity offers no speculative theory of ethics that renders certain courses of action personally and socially obligatory. The existence and priority of God known in his revelation is its basic affirmation. Speculative views may consider the existence or nonexistence of God irrelevant to ethical concerns, but for evangelical Christianity the content of morality turns on divine revelation and the Bible. One reason Protestant orthodoxy has in the past not devoted itself extensively to speculative morality is that it does not derive the essential content of ethics from philosophical reasoning but from rational revelation. This need not denigrate moral reflection, but it precludes derivation of the content of ethics from natural law no less than from tradition or evolutionary conjecture. The integrity of Christian ethics requires an affirmation of God in His revelation, and not simply shared values in the public order and deeper stress on the common good.

The Reformers did not deny that moral phenomena are set within a larger order of existence and comprise a transcendent reality knowable to human reason and not reducible to evolutionary or existential or experiential factors. They insisted on a theological account of ethics; any deontologized theory of ethics was excluded. Evangelical Protestants are doubtful that Thomas derived his natural law theory from Judeo-Christian ontology. The ancients who adduced natural law—notably Aristotle and the Stoics—predicated it on unacceptable ontologies. Freedom, truth, justice, and order do not depend for their credibility on a natural law theory. Thomas may have thought that he was directing Aristotelian thought God-ward; instead, he grounded Christian theism and morality on secular turf.

To their discredit, Western societies, long elevated above paganism by the vitalities of revealed religion, are today crumbling through their defection from the Judeo-Christian heritage. The loss of that inheritance has accommodated levels of brutality and vice reminiscent of barbarian heathen societies in the pre-Christian era. Not even Muslim philosophical and political thought, for all its reliance on force and its cruel intolerance of Christian believers, accords reason and morality an autonomous status, although Muslims to be sure allege that truth and justice are inaccessible to human reason except for the Khalif as Muhammad's successor.

The current drift to nihilism is a futile effort to erase from consciousness any awareness of God the infinite sovereign, the Lord of the mind, the commander of the will, and of his entrustment of imperatives of truth and morality to his creatures. Rejecting the rationality of God and any and all intelligible access to the divine, the modern spirit derives humanity instead from animal evolution and seeks to relativize the realm of being. Its flirtation with utilitarianism and with logical positivism has obscured criteria whereby to identify what is objectively transcendent and true.

Calvin does not disconnect the human awareness of moral accountability from the living God, nor does he connect it with philosophical reasoning. It does not function, as it were, "in separation from the whole of theology." Knowledge of an irreducible distinction between truth and falsehood and between good and evil is for Calvin prephilosophical, as is knowledge of God and of an outer world of selves and things. To know God is to know truth and the good. Consequently a theory of isolated moral principles inherent in man and discoverable by reason has no legitimacy.

The sin-warped predicament of man in whom God's creation-image is now flawed raises questions also about a body of commonly or universally perceived ethical imperatives. It is not in question that humans are confronted in general divine revelation by the will of the Creator, and that such revelation contains both formal and material elements. What is in question is the ability of sinful humanity to translate the moral revelation into a universally shared body of ethical truth.

If, as champions of natural morality insist, human nature is inherently structured with imperatives, how can humans know that these very requirements are ethically legitimate? The proponents of natural law are self-precluded from appealing to Scripture or special revelation (or even to general revelation). It is difficult to protect any form of intuitionism against the emergence of Hitler or Stalin or Mao who entrench counter-imperatives in vast segments of society. More than that, we are all, but for God's grace, potential Hitlers. The predicament of man in sin includes a propensity for perversion of religious reality. What humanity affirms solely on the basis of inherent instincts and philosophical reasoning lacks normative force; only what God says in Scripture and has disclosed in Christ is normative.

Calvin emphasized, indeed, that divine law is inscribed on human conscience. But to depict this as only a species of natural law is a pejorative characterization. The knowledge of God's revealed will turns on a revelation of divine information, and on some understanding of the supernatural. Ethical standards are supernatural in origin and stipulation. They involve the divine activity of general and special revelation and the *imago dei*, sullied yet real.

To go against conscience is indeed always wrong, yet conscience needs to be educated and corrected by Scripture. Calvin did not contrast the law of nature with biblical teaching, but rather viewed the law of nature as God's law given in creation.

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William Klempa steers a middle course on Calvin, attributing to him a revised concept of natural law. Klempa appeals to a passage in the final chapter of the *Institutes* unaltered in successive editions: "It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing less than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men." Calvin considers the moral law to have been revealed by the Creator at the outset of human existence. It governs man's pre-fall state and regulates his post-fall condition. The moral law is eternal, unchanging, and universal, and teaches that God is to be worshiped and that humans ought to love each other. The moral law thus summarizes the Decalogue.

By the law of nature, says Klempa, Calvin means the uncorrupted nature of man and of the world before the fall. Although aware of the corpus of pagan laws, Calvin invoked revealed law as the criterion for evaluating them. "While natural law is *ultimately* identical with the divine law, the relations of the law of nature as we know it and divine law are not now simply identical," Klempa comments. "Sin obscures . . . humanity's comprehension of the law of nature. The written law has been revealed to remove the obscurity."

Klempa concludes that Calvin departed from the earlier natural law tradition by identifying natural law with moral law. There is but one law obligating Gentiles and Jews alike. Calvin's references to natural law are not peripheral, but, as Harro Höpfl remarks, "Calvin never allowed to natural knowledge of the moral law any independent adequacy as a guide to moral conduct for Christians." Yet, contrary to Höpfl, says Klempa, Calvin held that natural law maxims provide "enough moral knowledge to enable pagans to sustain a semblance of civility and to condemn them in their own consciences, and they are also supplementary political resources for the Christian." Moreover, Calvin affirmed that a natural order of laws "can be discerned, and men and women do in fact discern it." But this is not unqualified, Klempa says. "What is objectively available to them they subjectively repulse, or else misconstrue and pervert. [But although] God's righteousness may again and again be held down in unrighteousness, Calvin is convinced that it could not be nullified." The moral light that unredeemed humanity possesses indeed "has power to distinguish between what is just and unjust, what is good and what is evil. Men and woman have a 'natural instinct' for government and the preservation of society. . . . Pagans understand many aspects of good behavior that are reinforced by the teaching of Scripture."

Braaten emphasizes that "none of the confessional documents of the Reformation," whether in Lutheran or Calvinist traditions, rejects natural law per se. The Reformers acknowledged that all human beings can know something of God's law through the works of creation by means of conscience and reason. Moral principles are universally inscribed in human nature and are directly ascertainable by human reason. For all that, the Reformers took sin seriously. Braaten would even say that sin distorts human reason and disorients the image of God in man. Yet he insists that ontological givens are not destroyed.

Braaten proposes that Protestant social ethics appropriate the natural law tradition, although with certain modifications. He recommends that "nature" in the concept of natural law be reunderstood as "the immanent structure of human reason"—in theological terms, the *imago dei*—and that "law" in natural law refer to "a moral principle written into human hearts by God," and therefore possessing universal validity. In brief, Braaten seeks to make the doctrine of natural law acceptable by redefining it.

Braaten emphasizes that natural law is given for the ordering of society, not for salvation. Yet he insists that natural law must be correlated with eschatology, a stipulation that some think relativizes the universal applicability of justice. Braaten's exposition of an otherwise powerful alternative to natural law theory is also needlessly weakened because, alongside his vigorous emphasis on the factuality of the *imago dei* in man and on a creation-bestowed ethic, he surrenders to negative biblical criticism the literal historical significance of the Genesis creation account.

Some Catholic scholars consider Braaten's proposals only a diversion, one that multiplies terminological confusion. If one speaks congenially of varieties of natural law, they fear, one might ultimately be reduced to only a minimalist consent. Some scholars speak of various *traditions* of natural law, but once someone speaks only of tradition he gives away the case for universal normativity. Natural law presupposes that all humans are involved whether they prefer to be or not.

Yet the recognition of varieties and traditions does not in principle rule out an appeal to a creation ethic and to general revelation as preferable to the Thomistic and other doctrines of natural law. If someone truly understands the essential differences between a creation ethic and Thomistic natural law theory, however, he must view natural law as a discredited way to conceptualize universal moral responsibility. Lutheran theology derived ethical norms not from human nature, as does Thomism, but from the divine orders of creation.

The main objections to approving the Scholastic doctrine of natural law were, first, the intrusion of sin into the created order and its consequences for the intellect, and second, the elevation of human reason above divine revelation in adducing ethical standards.

Stanley Hauerwas rejects natural law as yielding

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neither an independent nor a sufficient morality. Reason loosed from revelation cannot know any normative reality, he protests; it disintegrates into secular despair. Hauerwas asks how it is that if aborting a fetus is morally evil on grounds of natural law, it is mainly Roman Catholics who make that judgment. Paul Lehmann similarly disavows any "common link" in the human reason of believers and nonbelievers that yields shared ethical judgments.

Sir William Blackstone, whose monumental *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (published in 1765) deeply influenced jurisprudence, affirmed in a seminal chapter on "The Nature of Laws in General" that the will of man's Creator is called "the law of nature." "This law of nature, being coeval with mankind and dictated by God himself, is . . . superior in obligation to all other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times; no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid derive all their force, and all their authority, mediately or immediately, from this original." We are not to conclude, Blackstone comments, that the knowledge of truths written in Scripture "was attainable by reason, in its present corrupted state." The written form "revealed more effectively to fallen man the original law . . . that God had placed and revealed in the created order from the beginning."

Recent generations, by contrast, have increasingly viewed references in the early American political documents to "laws of nature and of nature's God," "self-evident" truths, "inalienable rights," and so forth, as reflective of a natural law tradition, especially Deism. But some recent writers insist that neither Enlightenment Deism nor other rationalistic nonbiblical sources—not even ancient Greek and Roman sources—are primogenitors of such ideas. Instead, they contend, Christian law and legal theory directly influenced these documents. The concept of "the law of nature or of God" was used many centuries before the emergence of the Deists, and not by Thomas Aquinas alone. Even in British common law tradition, emphasizes Gary T. Amos, "law of nature" meant the eternal moral law that God the Creator established over his created universe.

Blackstone, as noted previously, remarked that the will of the Creator is called "the law of nature" and he wrote expressly of the "law of nature" being "dictated by God himself." Others used "law of nature" and "law of God" interchangeably. Hence Amos contends that "Every key term in the Declaration of Independence had its roots in the Bible, Christian theology, the Western Christian intellectual tradition, medieval Christianity, Christian political theory, and the Christian influence on the six-hundred-year development of the English common law." Most of the nation's founders had a special regard for God and the Bible, and for Christian principles. They did not necessarily use the terms they did in a deistic sense. They did not regard faith and reason as alternatives, but believed in intelligible divine revelation. "The laws of nature and of nature's God" was a shorthand phrase for natural revelation and for special revelation: "creation law" and "scriptural law" were not at odds.

The dual reference to law of nature and law of God presumably arose from the Apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 1 and 2. John Murray in his volume on Paul's epistle to the Romans in The New International Commentary series argues that the term "law of nature" is a Christian concept rooted in Scripture, not a secular concept to be grasped independently of a revelatory epistemology. To interpret Romans 1 and 2 in deistic terms of natural religion is unjustifiable.

Luther may not have used the phrase "the orders of creation," but there is no doubt that he expounded the idea and employed related terms. It is through him that Lutheran theologians derived the conception of a creation ethic. Braaten observes that the nineteenth-century German Lutheran Adolf von Harless notably put special emphasis on "the orders of the Creator." The core of the doctrine is that apart from and prior to (although in tension with) the special revelation of God in Christ and Scripture, the moral law and commandment of God the Creator confronts all human beings through and in divinely given structures of creation, or a framework of universal orders, as givens of their creaturely existence. The doctrine was more fully elaborated in the 1930s by the German Lutheran theologians Werner Elert, Paul Althaus, and Walter Künneth among others, and also by some Calvinist dogmaticians, especially Emil Brunner.

Karl Barth rejected both Catholic natural law and Lutheran derivation of ethical norms from the orders of creation. He treated a creation ethic with the same disdain as natural law, on the grounds that the fall turned "an objective possibility created by God" into a subjective possibility no longer open to man. More usually the law inscribed on man's nature and reaffirmed in special written revelation is depicted as objective rather than subjective. But Barth's misguided denial of general revelation and his view of the fallibility of Scripture cancels the objective character of both. Natural law Barth dismisses as a fruitless moral quest by those who are strangers to or who ignore divine revelation and the Bible.

Without shared basic beliefs and consensus on what is good or evil no culture can long hope to escape disintegration. A piecemeal ethic, reflecting the conflicting moral precepts and preferences of competing societies, cannot rescue and redirect the masses in social distress.

Natural law theory promises uniformity of truth claims and of moral conviction and behavior. But the

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watershed for natural law theory came when Grotius professed to deduce natural law solely on humanistic premises independent of a divine mind or will, and hence apart from any religious framework. Some sponsors of the doctrine sought to ground it in the nature and will of God, but the diversity of human moral codes—and the claim of secular anthropologists to find contrary and contradictory ideals and practices in conflicting cultures—brought that into question. Yet a sinful race will corrupt any and every standard; there is no need to treat perversion as an ideal. Still, the argument is insufficient: natural law theorists—reaching back to and beyond the pre-Socratics—have themselves at times disagreed over the precise content of natural law. It has been invoked to defend freedom and slavery, hierarchy and equality.

Many critics have protested that the notion of autonomous reason on which natural law theory relies eventually becomes a rival to God and His Word. But more and more moderns now argue, rather, that human nature can no longer be depicted in terms of a basic human essence or purpose; instead, human nature is considered fluid in the process of evolutionary change, and logical and moral principles are alleged to be so as well. What is at stake here is a conflict of worldviews, and in this circumstance a presupposition of the self-revealed mega-divinity, the moral creator of all, offers the one prospect of objective truth, objective meaning, objective justice, and objective hope.

Barth's vigorous dismissal of a creation ethic as but a contemporary restatement of natural theology and natural law was unjustified. Theologians who supported a creation ethic did so as an alternative to the Thomist-Aristotelian conception of natural law. To be sure, creation ethic doctrine holds that, prior to salvific knowledge of Jesus Christ, human beings universally have some knowledge of right and good through the divine law of creation addressed to reason and conscience. No less than natural law theory, this doctrine stands over against ancient and modern dismissals of ethical norms as essentially conditioned by subjectivism, historical development, cultural environment, or evolutionary change, and thus shares with natural law the insistence on an objective truth and good. But it does this on quite different grounds.

Summarizing the creation ethic, Braaten defines the orders of creation as "the common structures of human existence, the indispensable conditions of the possibility of social life." The orders are "givens that can be experienced and recognized by human reason apart from faith and theology." One does not need to be a Christian to know these givens, though those who believe in God will acknowledge that the common structures of human existence are God's creation. God continues to create and sustain these orders despite mankind's fall into sin. The orders of creation are nonetheless now "shot through with the powers of sin and death." Yet the orders remain "the media through which the command of God addresses" human conscience; God speaks in and through the law written on human hearts. "God continues to order the natural life of humanity by means of the concrete historical structures that impinge on our existence," e.g., sex, marriage, and the family, labor and economics, government and culture.

No "empty world" exists, therefore, wherein for the first time believers need to introduce the law of God. God is ongoingly at work through "the law that orders life in the world." That law confronts all humans in their empirical existence; no sphere of life exists where it does not impinge on human conscience.

The Genesis account of the creation and fall of man leaves no doubt that definitive knowledge of good and evil is a divine prerogative and not a matter of human willing or doing. Only if and as God wills and reveals it, and not simply on the basis of man's own nature and prerogatives, can man have knowledge of good and evil. In his fallen condition, man's self-perception skews the actualities; we differ from what we think we know ourselves to be, and God differs from what we think Him to be. Yet in and through the *imago dei*, flawed but not nullified, humans are perpetually confronted by their Maker. In sin man seeks to repulse and revise God's universal revelation to, and in, the mind and conscience; yet despite the attempted cancellation of God's disclosure some light survives. It does not endure as a universally shared network of beliefs or system of doctrine, however, but rather in the form of fragmented knowledge that preserves every person's obligation and answerability to his Creator and abets civic order.

This argument takes on special significance in light of modernity's confusions concerning the moral order. Phillip E. Johnson writes of "the ambivalence with which our contemporary legal culture regards the proposition that there exists some objective standard of right and wrong against which human legal standards can be measured." Affirmation of such a standard seems to deny our moral autonomy and any right to set our own standards, whereas denial of a higher law seems to embrace nihilism, leaving us powerless against those who would dictate the law.

Johnson connects this impasse with the theme of the death of God, which liberates us to do whatever we want, yet strips us of any objective basis for challenging whatever others may want to do to us. The eclipse of God confronts us with a dilemma: we want, as Arthur Leff once put it, at one and the same time "to *discover* the right and the good and to *create* it." The "death" of God, in short, effects "the total elimination of any coherent, or even more-than-momentarily convincing, ethical or legal system dependent

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upon finally authoritative, extrasystematic premises." "Modernist rationalism" is giving way in the universities, Johnson affirms, to "postmodern nihilism," as one myth replaces another.

In his construction of natural law, Thomas Aquinas did not deny the historic Christian belief in the existence of God and of a revealed moral law with supernatural authority. What he emphasized, rather, is the existence of a "natural law" whose content is universally accessible to human reason independently of divine revelation on the basis of academic philosophy. The crucial issue then becomes how much moral law can be known by natural reason apart from transcendent divine revelation.

The modern outlook rejects premodern belief in God and the doctrines of divine creation and supernatural revelation. It recognizes no authority other than human authority. It assumes that the universe is amoral and that social norms are an evolutionary byproduct. The modernist impasse in law arises in this context, as Johnson notes, not from an identification of human liberties but from the imposition of human duties.

Leff enumerated many unpersuasive efforts to vindicate an objective moral order on a merely human foundation. These include, says Johnson, such substitutes for deity as the command of a sovereign ruler, the view of the majority, utilitarian appeal to the happiness of the greatest number, the Supreme Court's flexible interpretations of the Constitution, and projected values such as equity or autonomy. Leff discerned that modernity is involved in a struggle to escape the nihilism implicit in its rejection of an objective source of values. Nonetheless, he resigned himself to the absence of a supernatural and transcendent evaluator. Although he insisted, or at least acknowledged, that evil is evil—whether totalitarian mass murder, or napalming babies, or starving the poor—he remained committed to modernist presuppositions.

Primarily because it assumes the validity of Darwinian evolution—which in principle excludes any role for a Creator—modernist reasoning, Johnson emphasizes, denies that humans are responsibly made in the divine image. "Modernist philosophy," Johnson says, "teaches that when we lost God, we lost only a projection of the best that was in ourselves." He depicts as "a classic example of circular reasoning" the fact that Darwinian theory rests not on unprejudiced examination of evidence but on the prior assumption of the philosophy of naturalism. Not even "religion" can offer an escape from the modernist impasse if it secretly subscribes to the modernist definition of rationality. Modernist liberalism considers religious belief inherently nonrational. But rational secular morality "cannot conclusively decide" value questions, whether the survival value of the destitute or of fetal life. Common secular rationality, if it endeavors to resolve such concerns, must rely on unprovable assumptions. "Giving modernists the power to define rationality assures that, even if 'religion' is allowed a modest place in public discussion, God will continue to be effectively excluded."

Modern rationalism, Johnson emphasizes, holds to the existence of a common secular rationality that presumably can resolve public issues without reliance on unprovable assumptions. But political decisions are not reached apart from basic religious and metaphysical beliefs. If the views of atheists and agnostics alone were acceptable in the public domain, those beliefs distinctive of theists, and especially of Christians who hold that God is relevant to all arenas of life, would be excluded. One's view of the nature of the ultimately real world bears in crucial ways on all life-decisions. Much as one may appeal to universal rationality as supplying the content of ethics, universally shared norms cannot be distilled from what Johnson depicts as "the unanchored, self-validating human mind."

The human predicament, Johnson stresses, has its root cause in "humankind's alienation from God." The atheistic rationalism and the nihilism now permeating contemporary life are inevitable consequences of the apostasy expressed in the mindless Darwinian theory of evolution. Its naturalistic philosophical supports are more and more vulnerable if and as it proposes to connect responsibility with anything beyond humanity itself.

What moral power, then, can serve as a potent restorative and cohesive social force? Nothing other than respect for the commandment of God given at the creation of the human race. It is not by reading the entrails of evolutionary nature but by recognizing anew the Divine Valuator and a recovery of the *imago dei* that law will regain its power. FT

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Books In Review

Bully Pulpiteers

THE ROOSEVELTS: AN AMERICAN SAGA. By PETER COLLIER, with DAVID HOROWITZ. *Simon & Schuster. 542 pp. $27.50.*

Reviewed by **Janet Marsden**

THE PERENNIAL discussion of something called the American civil religion inevitably gets around to reflections on the presidency as a kind of priestly office. It is a form of religious establishment that is not only permitted but is required in the American republic, according to civic theologians such as Robert Bellah.

Even if we leave aside the one currently presiding over Dogpatch on the Potomac, such elevated talk about the presidency has always struck me as implausible, and maybe even just a little bit dangerous. A sure giveaway is that those who talk that way are usually reduced to demonstrating their thesis by almost exclusive reference to Washington and Lincoln. I do not doubt that Washington was a virtuous, wise, and generally exemplary figure, and, along with most literate Americans—at least those trained in the sensibilities of the North—my respect for Lincoln's practical sagacity and spiritual depth never flags. On occasion I pull out my Bartlett (the Fourteenth, of course) and reread the Lincoln quotes as bedtime devotion. Few men have said so much so well about the tragedy of the earthly city and our desperate hope for its healing, if not its redemption.

But Washington and Lincoln are two out of forty-two. Maybe that's not a bad ratio, given what history has taught us to expect from worldly rulers, but it is not enough to transform the presidency into a priestly order or an office of moral exemplification. Moreover, these two presided over most exceptional circumstances, the one at the founding of the experiment and the other at its near-death experience. To be sure, the civil religionists sometimes mention others, such as—depending upon their political proclivities—Jefferson, Jackson, Wilson, FDR, JFK, and, for the conservatively correct, Ronald Reagan. Hoover, who seems to have been a genuinely good man, was run over by the Depression and so never gets mentioned in this connection. Coolidge has been nominated (he was a particular favorite of Reagan's), but that is a taste that members of the chattering class are not likely to take to. The truth is that, once you get past Washington

JANET MARSDEN *is a writer living in New York City.*

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and Lincoln, few if any Presidents can be believably presented as spiritual directors of the national soul.

WHILE Theodore Roosevelt might not have been comfortable with talk about sacralizing the presidency, he is the one who dubbed the office a bully pulpit. Peter Collier, coauthor with David Horowitz of the justly acclaimed books *The Kennedys* and *The Fords,* leaves no doubt that TR did see himself as a moral guardian and exemplar, if not priest, of American national life. The office did not make him think of himself that way, but it did provide a bully chance to exhibit and exercise his moral talents. As Vice President he succeeded to the White House by assassination and later much regretted his pledge, upon being elected in his own right, to serve only one term. After the Bull Moose fiasco of 1912, and then being publicly vindicated in his agitations for preparedness before World War I, TR was positioned as the probable Republican nominee for 1920 and would, likely as not, have been elected had he not, to the surprise of all, died a year before the convention.

Garry Wills wrote memorably about *Nixon Agonistes*, but TR's was much more fully the agonistic persona and life, in no way limited (as Nixon was limited) to the sweated ambitions of political power. The Rough Rider of San Juan Hill, the world explorer, the popular author, the paterfamilias of Sagamore Hill—TR embodied the strenuous life that he preached and would have been a noted figure in American life even if he had never been President. The presidency was simply "the great arena" that permitted him to strut his stuff to maximum advantage.

Franklin, the other pivot on which Collier hangs his tale, was very different. He was viewed as a charming and not terribly bright young man who some thought beautiful and others called effete, and he seemed to have no greater ambition than to be like and to be liked by cousin Theodore. Undersecretary of the Navy, Governor of New York, President of the United States—Franklin hoped to scramble up the path his illustrious relative had blazed. Very much unlike TR, he had not defined his character; presumably it would be defined by high office once attained. Had he not been a politician, TR might very significantly have been a number of things. Had he not been a politician, it is hard to know what FDR would have been.

Franklin apparently had no doubt that he was supposed to distinguish himself in what was in more innocent days called "public service." (Are George and Barbara Bush the last ones to use that phrase without apparent awkwardness?) And he had no doubt that the criterion of distinction was TR. Franklin solidified his identification as a Roosevelt by marrying Eleanor. However plain she may have been, Eleanor secured his tie with the Oyster Bay branch of the family over which TR presided. Collier frames his entire story as a rivalry between the Oyster Bay Roo-

DISCIPLES AND DEMOCRACY

Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Politics

Edited by MICHAEL CROMARTIE

The religious right, currently the subject of intense press attention, is here scrutinized by both insiders and outside observers. Journalists **Fred Barnes** (*The New Republic*), **Michael Barone** (*U.S. News & World Report*), and **E. J. Dionne** (*Washington Post*), activists **Ralph Reed** (Christian Coalition) and **Michael Farris**, and scholarly analysts **John Green**, **Allen Hertzke**, **Michael Horowitz**, **Richard Land**, and **George Weigel** examine the agenda of religious conservatives, their influence upon the 1992 election, and whether and how they can increase their political influence in the next four years. In a foreword, **Irving Kristol** calls religious conservatives "the very core of an emerging American conservatism." The volume, published jointly by the Ethics and Public Policy Center and Eerdmans, includes brief comments by eighteen other informed observers as well. **147 pages, paper, $12.99** ■ ISBN 0-8028-0847-6

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sevelts and the Hyde Park Roosevelts, but, aside from Franklin's achievements, the distinctions rested almost entirely on the Oyster Bay side of the family. That had been the pattern, and it becomes more strikingly the pattern with the families of TR and FDR.

COLLIER PAYS unalloyed tribute to Franklin's valiant struggle against the polio that struck him in mid-career, but, that aside, almost everything else about Franklin's personal and family life ranges from the callow to the disastrous. What he experienced as the burden of being married to Eleanor was relieved somewhat by his taking a mistress—yet another thing, perhaps the main thing, for which Eleanor would not forgive him. Eleanor, meanwhile, was liberated to "find herself" in the company of lesbian feminists whom Franklin amusedly referred to as Eleanor's "she-male friends." (On the much-mooted point of whether Eleanor had sexual relations with her companions, Collier offers his best judgment that she did not.)

While TR's six children lived out a powerful aspiration to be worthy of their illustrious father, the children of Eleanor and Franklin deeply resented their parents and, again and again, exploited their privileged position to make life difficult for them, both personally and politically. Not to put too fine a point on it, the family life of Franklin and Eleanor was a psychological and moral shambles. The five children who survived to adulthood were married a total of nineteen times, with Elliott and Franklin, Jr. being married five times each. Nothing daunted, Eleanor wrote a popular syndicated advice column in which she counseled the American people on, among most everything else, how to have a healthy and happy family.

Both the Oyster Bay and Hyde Park Roosevelts were related to Christianity through their Episcopalian connection. They wore the connection lightly. TR essentially understood himself as a noble Roman. On a long and dangerous exploration into the jungles of Brazil, we are told, he took with him only the two books that he valued most highly, the reflections of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. But he showed up with some frequency at his local parish, and clergy were on hand to serve as chaplains in marking events of family consequence. It is the way, one assumes, Marcus Aurelius would have handled the religion thing had he been a Roosevelt in the early twentieth century. Franklin apparently felt no need for such auxiliary clerical services. Indeed there is little indication that he gave any thought at all to what some still call "the higher things." He was quite thoroughly occupied with being politically suc-

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cessful, personally charming, and admired by a handful of intimates. In her last years, Collier reports, Eleanor did consult with her rector on the question of whether they were all going to go to heaven. She received an entirely satisfactory answer.

So it's back to Washington and Lincoln for the civil religionists who would sacralize the presidency. No doubt there are always, even today, Americans who view the President, whoever he may be, as the living emblem of the nation's moral legitimacy. They will be happier if they do not read *The Roosevelts* and, for that matter, almost all presidential biography since Parson Weems' hagiography of Washington. Of course there will probably always be a market for that sort of thing, as witness the raves elicited by Doris Kearns Goodwin's adulatory account of Franklin and Eleanor, *No Ordinary Time*, also recently published. But Psalm 146 warns us not to put our trust in princes, and most Americans, or so one would like to think, have taken that counsel to heart, viewing the presidency as the nation's top political job, and the President as the nation's top politician until the next one comes along. This is not disrespectful; it is a healthy democratic skepticism that protects us against the dangers of political mystification.

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The Responsibilities of Power

IDEALISM WITHOUT ILLUSIONS: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1990s. By GEORGE WEIGEL. *Ethics and Public Policy Center/Eerdmans. 253 pp. $16.99 paper.*

Reviewed by **Sven F. Kraemer**

GEORGE WEIGEL's *Idealism Without Illusions* is must reading for every American—public official or private citizen, teacher or student—concerned about America's role in the post-Cold War world.

Perhaps not since Reinhold Niebuhr's classic post-World War II analyses has so valuable an attempt been made to provide an ethically and historically based framework to guide us through a period of shaking foundations, perplexing dilemmas, and new responsibilities. Weigel's eminently readable book jogs our memory, our conscience, and our courage to act in uncertain circumstances. It breaks through the idealist/realist impasse in its idealistic insistence on the moral foundations of policy and in its determination accurately to reflect reality. Weigel rediscovers historical truths, avoids the temptations of messianism and cynicism, and critically surveys global developments and foreign policy options as America redefines her national purpose abroad.

For Weigel, history has been shaped, rather than ended, by the Cold War, making that struggle's lessons of continuing importance even in its aftermath. History and international conflicts continue; the past is prologue as we strive to master our future.

It is refreshing that in this time of a new anti-anti-Communist revisionism, Weigel cuts through a good deal of misinformation. He exposes revisionists who during the Cold War tended to appease the Communist despots and who now tend to deny both that the Communist ideology and the Soviet empire were terribly different from our own or that the Western democracies "won" the Cold War. Weigel exposes the revisionists' continuing failure of moral imagination and unashamedly addresses the spiritual roots of the Cold War struggle.

He understands that politics, even international politics, is, or should be, an extension of ethics, with the classic goals of "justice, freedom, order, the general welfare, and peace." Spiritual values and noble ideals matter and so does power—moral and military alike.

WEIGEL understands Marxism, particularly Marxism-Leninism, as an innately anti-humanitarian and anti-political heresy. Like the closely related heresy of national socialism, communism preaches a worldly millennium without God or God's messiah, a "modern Moloch" with a false perfectionist vision forcibly imposed by elites through totalitarian dogmas, parties, and programs. Weigel understands that this heresy and the Soviet Leviathan did not collapse of their own weight but had to be contested and defeated, and that behind the Iron Curtain the Cold War battle was one of principled radical rebellion by spiritually anchored Christian and Jewish opponents. The dissidents stressed God-given conscience, ethics, creativity, and individual freedom as the defining social qualities—not parties, economics, or raw power. And they insistently demanded the protection of inalienable human rights and the establishment of democracy (though not always democratic capitalism) as indispensable to the fullest realization of individual and social potential.

Weigel has studied the rebels well. He illuminates the spiritual mainsprings of their "No," their pilgrimage, and their victory. Their motivation was not, as revisionists often suggest, primarily commercial or materialistic. Nor did they share the popular illusions about "conver-

SVEN F. KRAEMER *served on the National Security Council under four Presidents and ten NSC Advisors.*

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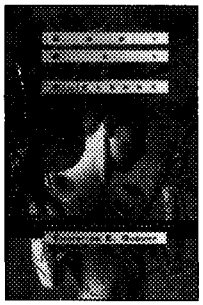

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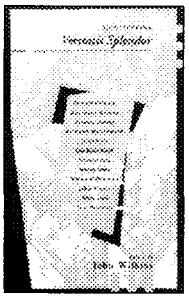

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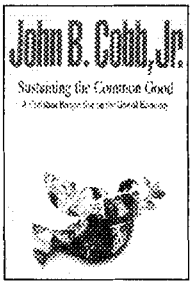

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gence" or "detente" as likely means of bridging the unbridgeable ethical chasm between the Communist regimes and their opponents.

Weigel's prophetic rebels include the extraordinary Polish Pope, John Paul II, "who lit the flame that ignited the Polish Revolution . . . (by preaching) the final revolution." They include also Czechoslovakia's Vaclav Havel, "who recognized that the fault line in Communist countries did not run only between 'us' and 'them' . . . (but) through every person" and who preached that each individual should combat "the culture of the lie" by "living in the truth." Weigel invokes as well the members of Poland's Solidarity, the Sakharovs and Orlovs of Russia, and the marvelous host of artists, priests, pastors, and others throughout Eastern Europe, not a few of whom became martyrs. On their side in America were men like Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, who linked rights and trade, and Ronald Reagan, who enthusiastically and without war embarked on a successful rollback of Communist ideologies, weapons, and walls.

In addition to identifying the beliefs and individuals of the resistance, Weigel points to the varied international efforts, military and nonmilitary, that deterred Communist conquests abroad and sought to protect and expand the freedom revolution behind the Iron Curtain.

THE FIRST indispensable international means was the institutional recognition and leverage provided through such programs as Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe as well as through the human rights "watch" groups, such as Charter 77, that were spawned, publicized, and protected by the 1975 Helsinki Accords. Subjected to international standards and exposed by relentless publicity, the Communist states could no longer be Stalin's "engineers of souls"; nor could they any longer pretend that their system was morally superior or even close to morally equivalent to Western democratic systems. Weigel notes that Ronald Reagan's freedom doctrine, stepping up broadcasts into the Soviet empire and providing diplomatic and military support to freedom fighters in Nicaragua and Afghanistan, helped shift the balance by demonstrating that it was possible to reverse the Soviet imperium's gains and its reactionary Brezhnev Doctrine.

The second indispensable international effort in defeating communism, according to Weigel, was the West's policy of containment, both "hardware and hardball," especially in the 1980s. He recognizes that "it is the regime, not the weapons" that are to be judged good or bad, and that military strength can serve positive purposes. NATO, for example, established and maintained lines that Moscow dared not cross militarily.

Weigel emphasizes two controversial steps of military deterrence undertaken by Ronald Reagan that greatly raised the cost of the Soviet empire and helped to break Moscow's will to maintain the Yalta imperial system. First was the 1983 implementation of NATO's earlier double-track decision (i.e., match Russia, or both go to zero) to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. Second was the decision that same year to launch the Strategic Defense Initiative as a means of countering Moscow's enormous investment—and lead—in offensive nuclear arms, as a lever for achieving a deep and verifiable strategic arms reduction treaty (Reagan's proposed START), and as an ethical alternative to nuclear deterrence based on Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD).

Weigel reminds us that these crucial steps were opposed by Westerners who endorsed Moscow's specious "arms race" arguments. The critics included the National and World Council of Churches, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and intellectuals like Paul Warnke, whose influential "apes on a treadmill" image of the superpowers bought into Moscow's propaganda.

As an additional major contribution to the West's victory in the Cold War, Weigel cites George Bush's decision to take on Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War. However, Weigel also notes with regret Bush's precipitous halt to the conflict, which cost a decisive victory and contributed to Hussein's survival, to the subsequent deaths of thousands of Kurds and Shiites, and to the legacy of a weakened multilateral approach to world crises.

LEFT UNLEARNED, the lessons of challenge, resistance, and victory in the Cold War presage new decades of threats and struggles. A lively "Settling Accounts" section of Weigel's analysis drives home important insights for the future by reminding us of the spurious arguments of individuals and institutions, noted above, that consistently undercut the West's struggle against the evil empire. Still unrepentant today, they could not or would not understand the moral or military realities of the Communist tyrannies and the required Western responses. Nor did those on the right who emphasize only a Fortress America type of military power, or who hesitate to link economics and trade to human rights requirements.

Weigel suggests that the maintenance of such illusory perspectives will leave us unable to handle current problems such as weapons proliferation, ethnic cleansing, Islamic fundamentalism, and instability in the former Soviet republics. He walks us carefully through the comparable current variants of the Cold War's foreign policy illusions. Although he does not describe today's illusions in quite the following terms, they include America-first isolationism, blame-America-first revisionism, muddled lowest-common-denominator multilateralism, the end-of-history illusion, and the economics-is-everything school. Against these he counterposes his own elements of a sound policy framework.

Weigel indicates that there is much to worry about and much to work on in our foreign policy. Readers will worry with him about rogue states, rogue weapons, and random terrorism, about our "paper tiger"

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Why Are Catholics Such Whiners?

You've heard it a zillion times: flaky nuns whining because they can't be priests, homosexuals demanding that the Church approve their "lifestyle," radical feminists bellyaching because God is our Father and the Church isn't "prochoice," dissenting theologians shooting their mouths off and berating the Pope.

Why so many whiners and complainers in the Church? If they're in such "pain," as they claim, why don't they seek out greener pastures? Surely it's not uncharitable — though it may be cheeky — to articulate such a *painfully* obvious question!

Recently, New Age-style Catholic priest, Matthew Fox, in an act of exemplary honesty, became an Anglican. No doubt he's much happier now. At about the same time, the Duchess of Kent and the former Bishop of London left Anglicanism to become Roman Catholics. Consider it a kind of "prisoner exchange." (We Catholics got a whale of a good deal here — but that's another story.)

The realignment of Christianity is picking up steam, something we at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW have been advocating ("cheekily," according to *Newsweek*) for years. We take our name from the 19th-century Oxford Movement in England, and our inspiration from the pioneering "papist" pilgrim, John Henry Newman. We are the forum for the new generation of converts to Rome. Among the converts who've written for us are Walker Percy, Russell Kirk, Sheldon Vanauken, Peter Kreeft, George Rutler, Thomas Howard, Ronda Chervin, and Paul Vitz. And we rejoice in the illustrious converts who've enriched the Church throughout history — Augustine, Chesterton, Maritain, Dawson, Muggeridge, Ronald Knox, Dorothy Day, and many more.

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anti-proliferation efforts, and about the absence of a strategic defense system—a system he considers a "moral and strategic imperative." We will worry about multilateralism's "false unanimity of consensus," and about the fact that as a "reluctant" superpower America is becoming an increasingly "modest" superpower. We will worry about the unserious nature of the current U.S. human rights policies in China, at the UN, and elsewhere. We will be concerned about increasing tribalization, about the form of reverse racism which suggests "that African countries are to be excused from observing the standards of civilized behavior that we expect from everybody else," and about the possibility that UN trusteeships may be required in some cases of intractable conflict.

With Weigel, we need to worry about the fact that Islam is still "waiting for an Augustine" to distinguish the realm of God and the realm of man and to desacralize politics. Without that, we face the possibility of a new Cold War between Islam and the West. And we will have to acknowledge that we have squandered important post-Cold War opportunities when "we allowed our guilt over our imperial past to evade our responsibilities in defining the terms of the postimperial peace," or that we have at times, as in the case of the former Yugoslavia, been "in the ridiculous position of supplicant before people who can't even rouse themselves to restrain the neighborhood hoodlums."

FOR ALL the book's virtues, there are elements in Weigel's analysis that are open to question. I disagree with his assessment that "Leninism is over and done with," or that, because of U.S. power, "the world is unipolar," or that (here he quotes someone else) "we are not facing mortal danger." And I wish he had addressed current arms control fallacies based on unverifiable and unenforceable agreements with unreliable partners that could lead to unilateral U.S. disarmament. In my view, the Communist Marxist-Leninist heresy is far from dead; also far from dead, for that matter, is its related meta-political heresy of fascism. At the same time, 30,000 nuclear weapons under uncertain control in Russia, as well as a growing global proliferation threat, do in fact place us, our allies, and our globe in mortal military danger.

I also believe Weigel was, at the time of his writing, unaware of the draconian cuts, mounting shortfalls, and continuing confusion in U.S. defense policies that will increasingly make us vulnerable to a wide range of threats. Our vulnerability then will lie not chiefly in our lack of understanding and willpower—as is the case now—but in a lack of actual military power should we muster the resolve to act.

There is for America another form of mortal danger, which one might perhaps call a mortal sin danger. Following our Cold War victory, we live in a situation of genuine possibility to buttress what is good in ourselves and in our world, and we have enormous moral and physical resources at our disposal. All the more reason that we cannot evade culpability for the casual shoulder shrug and the shameful decadence with which the United States and other Western powers have too often been blind Samaritans, waiting too long to act against the robbers of our neighbors' lives. Our moral, political, and military power has been paralyzed as hundreds of thousands of our global neighbors have been left unprotected, to be murdered before CNN cameras in Bosnia, in Rwanda, in Shiite and Kurdish areas of Iraq, in parts of the former Soviet Union. What boundless shame.

We need to lead the democratic nations in acting to end mass murders, enforce cease fires, preempt proliferation, bring international criminals to trial, and establish the grounds for negotiating peace and political settlements—even in situations where we cannot guarantee a painless effort or "assured victory." We should heed George Weigel's words: "If we do not take the prudent risks of leadership now, while we have the power to bend at least some events to our will, we are certain to get into even deeper trouble later." Trouble indeed.

PC Science

HIGHER SUPERSTITION: THE ACADEMIC LEFT AND ITS QUARRELS WITH SCIENCE. By PAUL R. GROSS and NORMAN LEVITT. *Johns Hopkins University Press. 314 pp. $25.95.*

Reviewed by **Jon F. Fielder**

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY entitled a recent episode of *Firing Line* "Why Political Correctness is a Menace and a Bore." It is a sad commentary on the state of higher education that this diagnosis is so accurate, for stories of left-wing nonsense have, by virtue of their prevalence, become tiresome. Postmodernism and related varieties of nihilism have so entrenched themselves in the humanities and social sciences that one can look forward to decades of celebration of the worst that has been thought and said. The question now arises: have these maladies infected the hard sciences as well? Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt (a biologist and a mathematician, respectively) perceive such a growing threat, and *Higher Superstition* is intended to raise the alarm.

Much of their well-written and sardonic account should be familiar to observers of the academy by now. Feminists complain about the supposedly passive role assigned the egg in fertilization; Afrocentrists distort history to promote self-esteem; cultural constructivists question the validity of bourgeois science; and postmodernists prattle on endlessly about the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. While the rest of us thought that an understanding of AIDS would come from biomedical laboratories, the postmodernists tell us that in fact what is needed are "concepts drawn from the discourse of mathematics, principally post-

JON F. FIELDER *is in the M.D./Ph.D. Program at Baylor College of Medicine.*

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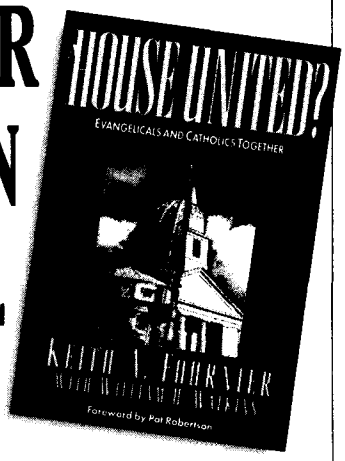
Euclidean geometry, which provides for topological mappings, based on a non-Euclidean concept of space." Quantum mechanics, traditionally viewed as an astounding advance in our comprehension of the universe, becomes the product not of great minds but of the uncertainty and social upheaval arising from World War I. Similar silly examples may be plucked at random from virtually every page.

This book, however, is more than a catalog of idiocy. The authors also conscientiously attempt to dissect the reasoning (or lack thereof) of leftist critics. Perhaps the harshest rebukes are aimed at the feminists, who offer up the standard boilerplate about the patriarchal paradigm of Western science. Gross and Levitt call their bluff: "Feminist cultural analysis has not yet identified any heretofore undetected flaws in the logic, or predictive powers, or the applicability of mathematics, physics, chemistry, or—much complaining to the contrary notwithstanding—biology." Anyone who has spent time recently on American campuses can attest to the feminist tendency to overgeneralize and reduce nearly all phenomena to supposed manifestations of sexism. Again, the authors will not stand for facile explanations: "It is possible—though tendentious—to impute sexist intent to a simple algebra problem in which 'Peter is meeting his girlfriend Melissa at the airport.' It's a rather more difficult trick to find sexism if a problem reads: 'Prove that a 1-connected closed 3-manifold is homeomorphic to S^3.'" Gross and Levitt, sympathetic to the feminists' claims for equality, readily admit that there are, to be sure, inequities; but it is white males who constitute a remaining official object of discrimination in the sciences. Nor do the authors buy the "role-model" justification for affirmative action: "Generations of Jewish kids have done quite well at these [word] problems, despite having to concern themselves with Johnny's Christmas money, rather than Menachem's Chanukah gelt."

Left-wing attacks on science may be divided into two categories: criticism of the very process and idea of science in general or criticism of the results of science in particular. The claims of radical environmentalism straddle this divide. When inflated predictions of doom are found wanting, the eco-warriors resort to worshiping some long-dead primal earth, unadulterated by man's hubris. The only way out is to jettison science and its reliance upon rational analysis and artificial experimentation. In reality, however, native peoples have not always treated the land wisely. This mode of thinking, the authors correctly point out, presents a very real threat to a sound environmental policy, for only science can properly assess the risks

A CALL FOR COOPERATION AMONG ALL CHRISTIANS.



The Church today is a divided house. Christians are separated into Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox camps, and even within these groups myriad doctrinal, spiritual, and social issues divide and distract us.

Meanwhile, modern civilization continues to decline. Society is literally *dying* for the attention of the Church. But how can Christ's Church effectively represent Him when it is so caught up in its own affairs?

In *A House United?*, Keith Fournier presents a compelling case for the building of alliances among Christians of all confessions and traditions. Drawing from the Bible, church history, and the historic, ground-breaking accord *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (the complete text of which is included in this book), Fournier provides a challenging, hope-filled blueprint for reclaiming culture through the cooperation of all Christians.

Fournier contributes a timely and much needed analysis of how and why Catholics and Evangelicals should join in strategic actions together. Don't miss his message.
—Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R., President, Franciscan University of Steubenville

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and evaluate the advantages of the technologies it creates. Modifying the well-known phrase, Gross and Levitt argue that "myths have consequences."

Included in the assault against science are the complaints of the professional AIDS activists. Despite the protestations of Larry Kramer et al., these groups must know that their only hope is modern biomedicine. Without it, they are doomed. Against this backdrop, ascribing the "epidemic" to an uncaring scientific-governmental-industrial triad is only the violent, irrational lashing out of a desperate, self-alienated interest group. To their credit, the authors do not allow any feelings of "compassion" to stand in the way of an appropriate rebuttal. Kramer's ravings are shown to be just that, and nothing more. These activists are perpetrating above all an attack on decency; science is but an unfortunate casualty.

The distortions of Afrocentrism, another pet theory of our chattering classes, should be viewed in the same light. The attempts to regain some lost, glorious scientific achievements from Africa's ancient past constitute, again, not an attack on the process of science per se, but rather upon the discipline of history. In this case, however, the harm done to science is minor compared to the affront against blacks, who are being used—yet again—to service a left-wing political agenda. No serious person doubts that individuals of all races can contribute to our understanding and manipulation of the natural world. But the left is uninterested in such bourgeois pursuits. One is reminded of Arthur Schlesinger's comment that if a Klansman were to endeavor to retard the progress of blacks, he could do no better than promote an Afrocentric curriculum.

SO WHY HAS the left now turned its guns upon science? Gross and Levitt believe the assault was inevitable, for despite its denunciations of traditional disciplines, postmodernism is itself a "totalizing" ideology compelled to bring all areas of study under its sway. (The authors go so far as to compare this impulse to fascism.) Having severed the link between fact and value, left-wing theorists are now committed to bringing "indeterminacy" to the hard sciences. Longing for the prestige now bestowed upon the masters of technology, those in the humanities and social sciences suffer "physics envy." The postmodern brotherhood resents the confidence with which scientists draw conclusions from hard-won evidence. But they resent it not because historians, say, cannot do the same, but because they have decided that doing so would admit the existence of Truth and reality.

Ironically, this "physics envy" could be cured if the academic left returned to traditional methods of scholarship. Recently, Gertrude Himmelfarb, in her collection of essays *On Looking into the Abyss*, has shown how the postmodernists have abandoned the rigorous process whereby historians once drew firm conclusions on the basis of verifiable evidence. In the past, the difference between the humanities and the hard sciences in this respect was only one of degree, albeit a sometimes significant one. With the advent of postmodernism, however, the difference has become one of kind. The academic left, having dispensed with any notions of Truth, has deemed it necessary to deny the legitimacy of evidence once used toward this end. Thus, Evelyn Fox Keller, a leading feminist critic of science, can claim with a (presumably) straight face that "even the actual data of the natural sciences are not written in nature" but "are subject to the play of social forces."

Gross and Levitt also identify more subtle, personal factors driving the postmodern juggernaut. Writing and "theorizing" about the implications of "chaos" is a means of professional advancement. But it is also a means of spiritual redemption, an escape from the modern capitalist world, a world indebted to Western science. In this sense, the left's attack on science is no different from its attack on the West in general. Self-righteousness is no longer to be avoided, for the validity of an argument today is determined by the intensity of the feelings behind it. But just as tenured radicals sit in chairs endowed by oil magnates, so is the relationship between the postmodernist and his nemesis marked by irony:

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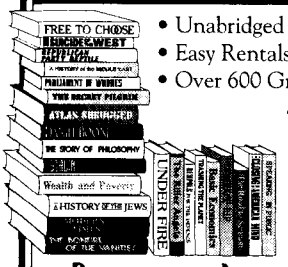

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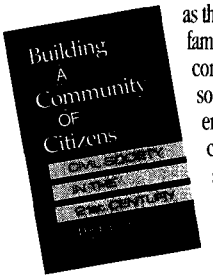
> Moralism has the bad intellectual habit of excusing itself, on its own grounds, for weak and shoddy arguments. Moralism of this kind is, for instance, untroubled by the fact that its denunciations of Western scientific epistemology are composed on word processors whose very existence derives from a subtle understanding of the universe encoded in quantum mechanics. . . . It lives very comfortably with all such contradictions.

UNFORTUNATELY, Gross and Levitt's discussion of this ideology is marked by a tone that is all too familiar when liberals criticize their own. Feminists, they insist, are sincere, just misguided. The reader is assured that most scientists share feminist concerns. Moreover, the authors accuse academics of endangering the careers of budding female scientists and of engaging in a type of religious fanaticism. In the book's most memorable one-liner, feminism and the other schools of thought named here are referred to as "our academic inner city." Unfortunately, despite both their critical analysis and brilliant polemics, the authors' desire to distance themselves from conservatives emerges throughout and taints an otherwise worthy book. One gets the feeling that the authors would hate to cede anything to conservatives, who are, in fact, their most natural allies.

Thus when Gross and Levitt criticize the academic left's shenanigans they are in their own eyes wholly justified, but conservatives who do the same are suspected of mere political partisanship. The readers of the *American Spectator* and *National Review* are tarred as mean-spirited ideologues. There is concern about being perceived as "stalking-horses for social conservatism" and acknowledgment that, yes, indeed, the capitalist enterprise (fueled in no small part by science) has yet to cure every social ill. The authors fret, "For the first time in modern American history, right-wing theorists seem on the point of establishing themselves upon the philosophical and ethical high ground, thanks to postmodern contortions of the left." Gross and Levitt would seem to be under the impression that for years now the humanities have been a bastion of anticommunism—or perhaps they do not recognize this position as the moral high ground at all. In any case, this whole approach is disappointing, especially since the authors appear to be for the greater part open-minded and fair, drawing upon the works of conservatives such as Michael Fumento and Jonathan Adler. If people are truly convinced of the rightness of their position, then they should not care in whose company it places them.

IN ANY CASE, the authors, self-avowed technocrats and staunch defenders of Reason, blame an anti-Enlightenment ideology for the modern left's irrational behavior. But they fail to recognize that one important legacy of the Enlightenment is intellectuals unconstrained by any sense of humility. As Burke remarked, "In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows." Only a phenomenal arrogance could lead someone to toy with processes too complicated for his understanding, with results more consistent with political zealotry than with reasoned argument. How else to explain why one critic would dedicate his jeremiad to "all the science teachers I never had"? Others babble endlessly about "nonlinearity" without ever demonstrating any knowledge of the concept. (Linearity is taken by the postmodernist to signify, in the words of Gross and Levitt, "relentless sequentiality, unbending purposefulness, single-mindedness," while nonlinearity connotes "multiculturalism, diversity . . . and the effacement of boundaries.") The uncertainty principle is the shining jewel in the postmodern crown, but, as the authors point out, it is actually a beautiful scientific *truth*, and anyone who has taken undergraduate quantum mechanics can derive the result. (A friend of

Building A Community Of Citizens explores the condition of American civil society, evaluates the forces – political, social, demographic, and global – that are operating upon it, and provides critical thinking on how to strengthen it in the decades ahead. Drawing from some of the country's leading thinkers, it looks candidly at the stress fractures on American Society – issues such as the underclass, gender, family, and religion, and concludes with five philosophical perspectives: libertarian, populist, communitarian, traditionalist, and the political and cultural center.



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mine at a prestigious undergraduate institution claims the uncertainty principle has helped him through many a philosophy paper.) In their characteristically humorous manner, Gross and Levitt comment: "This is not the kind of history of quantum mechanics where the intriguing role of noncommuting self-adjoint operators on complex Hilbert space gets much of an airing." "Rational" economic planners and seemingly irrational critics of science are more similar than different: they share an unbounded faith in themselves.

This is all very depressing in and of itself, but one wonders about the ultimate consequences. The authors admit that critiques from the left are not likely to affect polymer chemistry. In the end, they have only examined one aspect of a larger phenomenon, the decline of the humanities. For it is the humanities that will suffer the most from a crusade against science. Indeed, the authors warn of a widening rift between the humanistic disciplines and the hard sciences that will eventually erode public trust in the former. One can only hope that in time students will come to recognize that arguing for the unknowability of reality is not a very valuable way to spend their college years.

One real threat, for Gross and Levitt, resides in the effect on the layman's comprehension of complex scientific issues related to public policy questions. But Americans were sufficiently confused about these matters before the birth of postmodernism. The average citizen's understanding of genetic engineering will most likely not be altered by the "feminist-critique-of-science mafia" or the Afrocentric distortions of history. On the other hand, the authors believe that the extent to which a society rejects such nonsense is a mark of its vitality. By this standard, American culture is currently experiencing the intellectual equivalent of muscular atrophy.

Unfortunately, the countermeasures suggested in *Higher Superstition* are mere palliatives that will at most have a small impact. Scientists, besides rebutting fanatical speakers and teaching young students to keep their guard up, can, sadly, do very little. The cause of the disease lies outside the scientist's province, and so does its cure. Since the pseudo-scientific theories of the charlatans are part of a larger agenda to discredit bourgeois society, only a reclaiming of the humanities from them will bring relief. In the meantime, when their word processors fail, our modern-day Luddites will not entreat the aid of the Literary Studies chair, but will pick up the phone and call Microsoft. Maybe that is a cause for hope.

Pluralism Without Relativism

THE MORALITY OF PLURALISM. By JOHN KEKES. *Princeton University Press. 227 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by **Deal W. Hudson**

SURELY most people over age forty have noticed that in the past two decades a dramatic change has occurred in our attitude toward the fortunes of the West. I can remember in college and graduate school reading Eliot, Yeats, Auden, Beckett, and Camus while bemoaning with everyone else, including the teacher, the loss of a shared vision about the purpose of human life.

Much of the intellectual and spiritual energy of those days was derived from the urge to rediscover or redefine that common purpose. We rallied around the great books and the defense of liberal education, and wrote impassioned critiques of the contemporary moral breakdown and loss of faith. The agony of the modern age seemed aptly caught in the horror of Picasso's *Guernica*, the spiritual exhaustion of Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*, and Yeats' prophetic line, "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." Paul Johnson's magisterial *Modern Times*, published in 1983, only seemed to confirm our worst fears about the meaning of the twentieth century.

But it is safe to say that the students of the present generation are being given quite a different slant on the fact of cultural change and moral diversity. The decentering and dethroning of established authority are hailed as paths of liberation from the injustices of the past. Pluralism and diversity are celebrated as signs of moral and political growth. Students are told by their teachers that society is enriched by the inclusion of new voices formerly unheard and oppressed.

Very often this diversity is delineated entirely in terms of the sex, race, or ethnicity of the person or group speaking rather than any substantive difference in moral or political aims. John Kekes' recent book distinguishes itself because, without pandering to these special political interests, it advocates a "morality of pluralism" that forces even the most resistant reader to rethink the so-called "disintegration thesis" of Western morality.

It is also to his credit that Kekes advocates a genuine pluralism while also affirming a common conception of human nature. This insistence clearly distinguishes his project from the postmoderns who consider any universal claims (but their own) the prelude to tyranny. Kekes, who is concerned about the possibility of tyranny as well, posits a set of objective primary values somehow founded on human nature. These primary values are no different from the basic physical, psychological, and political needs we commonly talk about.

PLURALISM becomes necessary when the concrete realization of these values differs from society to society and individual to individual, as it inevitably will. The diversity of what Kekes calls secondary values arises as cultures give form to the content of the primary values: "And of course these forms, interpretations, attempts at the *civilization of our raw drives*—choose the metaphor that pleases—these secondary val-

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ues, that is, will be different in different contexts" (emphasis added).

The author goes on to carefully distinguish pluralism from the monistic ideal of one common moral standard, from the relativistic view that all values are conventional, and, interestingly, from liberalism. Liberalism differs from pluralism, he says, in two ways: first, in its insistence on the neutrality of the state toward moral values, and, second, in its affirmation of overriding values. For Kekes, pluralists must deny any overriding values, even that of the good life itself, for the simple reason that any moral value can be relativized by circumstances. At the same time, they insist that the function of the state is to guarantee the conditions in which good lives can be realized, a purpose that cannot be served by neutrality. Liberals are not being consistent, then, when they do not recognize that there simply are some procedural values, such as the legal protection of human rights, about which the state cannot be neutral.

Thus the "morality of pluralism" is committed to protecting what Kekes calls the "deep conventions" in "morally acceptable traditions," i.e., those that set appropriate limits on the making of good lives. Good lives are *made* rather than *found*, he insists, simply because without overriding values for human life, the possibilities of a good life are highly variable. The good life that Kekes portrays is less a journey toward an end than a balancing act of resolving conflicts or "reasonable conflict resolution" among all competing values.

Assuming for the moment that one is attracted to this version of reasonable and humane pluralism, the question naturally arises, how and on what grounds can one set limits to values? Or recognize morally bad lives? At this point the author turns once again to the deep conventions that ought to instruct our moral imaginations, such as prohibitions against murder, torture, slavery, and the like. These "truisms" should form a kind of perimeter for the moral imagination, even if there will be exceptional cases based on social and historical circumstances. Since pluralists recognize the fact of exceptions to deep conventions, and lack any overriding values, the problem is "to arrest the slide" that begins with the rejection of a watertight monism and ends with blatant relativism.

KEKES CITES the example of the live burial of spear-masters among the Dinka tribe of the Southern Sudan, a custom finally outlawed by the Sudanese government, to illustrate his disagreement with relativism. Those who would defend the custom in order to preserve the integrity of Dinka tradition and beliefs fail to distinguish between moral agents and their particular actions. Certainly, he says, we have no need to find the Dinka guilty of intentionally murdering their spear-masters. These men died willingly, believing that their dying breath re-

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vitalized the life of the whole tribe. But neither the action itself nor its symbolic interpretation produces the effect it claims—that of benefiting life—making the ritual a violation of the deep convention protecting human life. Notice that Kekes is willing to make this judgment in spite of Dinka tribal belief.

If one were to ask how it is we know when the practices of one moral tradition can be used to measure another, the answer must be pursued on a case-by-case basis. In the case of the Dinka ritual, we know that a dying man's last breath in fact has no effect on the people standing at the graveside. When Kekes compares this example with the eventuality that we might one day discover that blood transfusions are harmful, he evinces the materialist bias of his analysis. For Kekes, a spiritual end, a highest good, is incompatible with the morality of pluralism; we should be thankful that morality has been freed from the "straightjacket" of such a monism, so that we can make moral progress by taking the corrective steps, both public and private, toward living in conformity with deep conventions.

What stands behind all these inevitable moral conflicts is this deposit of deep conventions protecting the transcultural primary values of human life. Yet no part, no single tradition, can claim a superior vantage point for viewing the whole. Whether or not our primary values, and the deep conventions that surround them, can be traced back only to "raw drives" Kekes does not speculate. To follow this trail might lead him back toward the monism, the center, he so resolutely wants to avoid. Yet, at the same time, it would make much greater sense of his consistent appeals to human nature and the objectivity of primary values that make this defense of pluralism so tantalizing.

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Updating St. Anselm?

THE PHYSICS OF IMMORTALITY. By FRANK J. TIPLER. *Doubleday. 528 pp. $24.95.*

***Reviewed by* John J. Reilly**

CULTURES have their insistences. Navajos, I am told, tend to leave unfinished some little detail of any work they do, just for good luck. Thus, a geometrical design will have a corner undone, or a familiar story will be told on any given occasion with a minor incident omitted. The Bolshevik regime in Russia was vehemently antireligious, yet its leaders found it perfectly natural to embalm and perpetually display the body of Lenin for all the world like the incorrupt body of a Russian saint.

America too has its insistences, features of its culture that are often invisible to the natives but the most striking characteristics of the country in the eyes of foreigners. America, we know from earliest report, has always managed to be both extremely religious and implacably antimetaphysical. Thus, America is the world capital both of textual literalism in religion and of science ambitious to prophesy. Without careful watching, Americans will tend to reduce metaphysical questions to engineering problems, all the while believing that they are resolving real metaphysical difficulties.

A particularly vivid example of this tendency is provided by Frank J. Tipler's new book, *The Physics of Immortality*. In this book Dr. Tipler, Professor of Mathematical Physics at Tulane University, purports to demonstrate scientifically the existence of God, the resurrection of the dead, and the moral coherence of the universe (indeed, of all universes, since the author is an adherent of the "Many Worlds" interpretation of quantum mechanics). *The Physics of Immortality* sets out an amplified and more extreme version of the speculations about the fate of the universe that appeared in *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (1986), a highly influential work that Tipler coauthored with the British astrophysicist, John D. Barrow. The gist of the earlier book, at least as I understood it, is that we are living in a very improbable universe. If any of the physical and mathematical constants on which physical reality depends were only slightly different, there would not only be no human race, there would be nothing worth mentioning. The Anthropic Principle is that, despite the modern cliché that we live in a hostile world unconcerned with human happiness, in reality the structure and history of the universe are friendly to man. Indeed, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* also claimed to prove that man is the only intelligent species in the universe, and will be the only progenitor of the greater intelligences yet to be. In *The Physics of Immortality*, the author explains how the universe can be this way and what its future must be.

TIPLER is primarily an expert in global relativity theory, a discipline whose founding he credits to Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking. Global relativity theory is largely concerned with the shape of the universe in hyperspace, which means both in space and time. When you know what form the universe will assume, you know a lot about its destiny. A closed universe is one with sufficient mass that gravity causes it to eventually cease expanding from the original Big Bang and ultimately fall back in on itself. While there are some highly unlikely situations in which a reexpansion could then occasion a new cosmic cycle, the most likely fate for a closed universe is a singularity, a black hole. There is no before or after this single stroke of expansion and contraction, since time, too, expands and contracts in the process. A universe that is open or flat, on the other hand, will either continue to expand indefinitely, or expand ever more slowly

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toward a limit. In either case, such a universe will suffer the "heat death," that is, eventually all the energy in it will be used up. Tipler argues that the only way life could survive would be in a closed universe. Now life, in the scheme of this book, is simply a kind of pattern. Human minds are computer programs, and even human bodies could be perfectly expressed ("emulated") in a computer program. It is in this form, as patterned information, that life will survive into the harsh conditions of the far future, which no conceivable flesh and blood could bear.

If a final collapse were structured correctly, intelligent entities would have more and more energy available to them the closer the collapse comes to the Omega Point. (Remember that this collapse does not mean just that all the stuff in space is closing in on a central point, it means that all of space itself is closing in on a central point.) If time is interpreted to mean subjective time, the time in which you think, these entities could in fact concentrate a literal infinity of experience into the final instants of the universe. In the approach to the Omega Point, all the information there is, the entire history of the universe down to its least detail, will be available in principle. Since an infinity of energy will also be available, everything that could be done in principle could also be done in fact. Even if the retrieval of this information entails insurmountable technical problems, still nothing will be lost: it will be possible to create a computer emulation of the universe, indeed of every possible universe that could have occurred given the known number of atomic particles. The mathematical explanation that the author gives for the problem of emulating all possible universes is a tribute to the power of multiple exponents to express really, really big numbers.

THESE EMULATIONS will, of course, include us, so we will be resurrected. The computers of this ultimate age will not be vulgar hardware, but ethereal entities composed of bent space and structured energy. They will advance in wisdom and power as more energy becomes available to them. (The author uses price theory to show that they will also advance in goodness, since altruism on their part will become ever cheaper to them. They will love us and care for us.) Long before the end of the universe's history, all the matter in it will have been restructured to the specifications of intelligent entities. The stars themselves will only be construction material. In the latter-most days, all creation will become a single, thinking artifact. The limit of this process is the Omega Point, the singularity beyond the end of the universe, which relativity theory represents simply as a boundary, as something outside time.

Still, It will be Personal, since It will incorporate the ability to generate personalities. It will be omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Being omnipresent might not seem to be much of an accomplishment when the cosmos has just become a dimensionless point. Omnipresence is more complicated than that, however. Although the physics of everyday life is subject to the second law of thermodynamics, so that ordinarily physical events are not reversible, this is not true of global relativity. In the latter context, the future determines the past as much as the other way around. Thus, the Omega Point in the ultimate future determined the initial cosmic conditions that made it possible, which means it is also the creator. The Omega Point, by any reasonable definition, is You Know Who.

Elements of this scenario may seem counterintuitive to the uninstructed reader. They make a bit more sense if you understand that the author explicitly declares his intention to be nothing less than to make theology a branch of physics. He warns us that this is the only way that religion could possibly survive, since science has made the supernatural as traditionally conceived unbelievable to the educated person. Or at any rate, he says it is unbelievable to scientists.

In his theological ambitions, Tipler can hardly be accused of autodidacticism. He has consulted extensively with modern theologians

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to see whether they could give a credible account of their faith in traditional terms. He has, predictably, found them as a class to be blithering hypocrites, more interested in politics than in God. The chief exception among living theologians is Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose radically eschatological theology he finds congenial. His favorite dead theologian is Thomas Aquinas. I, for one, find this perfectly reasonable. St. Thomas' angels do in fact bear a suspicious resemblance to mathematical entities that could easily be expressed in algorithms. The Thomistic theory of perception does lend itself to being expressed as digital data encryption. Tipler's hope for immortality rests in large part in the supposed characteristics of a kind of non-thermodynamic time very much like Thomas' "aevum." But I digress.

GIVEN THE author's breathtaking notions of what physics encompasses, his ambitions are almost logical. For instance, he notes that Leibnitz's principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (which means that if you can't tell two things apart, then they are really the same thing) has held up pretty well in practice. Therefore, he pronounces it a principle of physics. The problem with declaring everything that is true to be part of physics is that it makes it difficult for him to make certain distinctions, such as that between logical and physical impossibility. For instance, he notes that God can only be acquitted of being the author of evil if it would have been logically impossible for God to have created a world in which evil was impossible. He then solves the problem of theodicy by pointing out that his "Many Worlds" interpretation of quantum mechanics permits a very large number of almost perfect worlds, all converging on the Omega Point. There are many worlds because, according to Tipler, everything that quantum physics says might happen, does happen, but in different worlds (or, as he prefers, along different histories). This is why the Omega Point has to occur, since even if it is improbable, there must still be histories in which it actually does happen. If this is the way the universe is structured, then it would be a violation of the laws of physics for God to have removed all the bad possibilities from these history lines. The author, however, seems to think that such an intervention would have been a violation of logic.

The last three chapters of the book (there is also an extensive Appendix for Scientists) attempts to reconcile the Omega Point Theory with the world's religions. In these chapters, I found the author addressing many points that I had made in the margins of the earlier chapters. (He had hosted a colloquium on this theory, and it seems that many of the participants must have been awake.) For instance, though he finds the historical evidence for Christianity unpersuasive, he does note that the body of the post-Easter Jesus as depicted in the Gospels does have many of the qualities that a computer-emulated body would have in an emulated environment. That is, it was solid and organic, able to change its appearance, and able to appear instantly in any part of the emulation at will. He also notes that if it were necessary to the formation of the Omega Point for Jesus to rise from the dead, then quantum mechanics would make this extraordinarily unlikely event not just possible, but inevitable.

There are moments where the author seems to grow uncomfortable with the implications of his insistence that everything in the universe, without exception, can be transformed into a computer program. Programs can exist within programs. "Virtual" computers, consisting purely of information, can exist and function within hardware computers. This sort of relationship strongly suggests the tradi-

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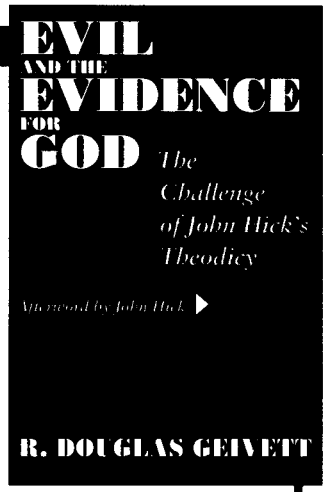

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tional metaphysical notion of "levels of being." For a world being emulated on a computer, the system below it (on a lower level of "implementation") would be quite literally supernatural. Tipler insists that there is no evidence for a level of implementation below the level of the world we see. Well, there's a comfort. The fact is, however, that though he imagines himself to be giving Platonic metaphysics a drubbing with his ontological monism, what he has in fact done is create a particularly unnerving form of Neoplatonism. His physics is essentially a hierarchy of mind.

The Physics of Immortality could perhaps only have occurred in the same culture, and in the same era, that would keep a book like James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* on the best-seller list for a year. That book presents both interpersonal relationships and the structure of history as outcomes of the evolving economy of "qi" force. This is the invisible universal vital power that all living creatures are supposed to generate, and the struggle for which creates so much trouble in the world. How to deal with other people's need for vital energy and how to get your own are the basic questions of ethics. Both books confuse a kind of stuff with metaphysical principles, and both tend to render the real stuff in the world a little more ghostly, because they ask it to do double duty as spirit. The authors are incredulous of radical evil. Tipler informs us that science has shown that there neither are nor will be any evil spirits, while even the villains in *The Celestine Prophecy* are just suffering from psychic malnourishment. The books appeal to a fierce desire for religion coupled with an almost invincible incomprehension of its traditional forms. In particular, neither has much use for a God who can be prayed to, except as a psychological exercise. Perhaps both will find comparable amounts of appeal to readers with different kinds of education. However, I rather think that, in a contest, the sort of spirituality found in *The Celestine Prophecy* would win out. Both books, after all, are about equally confused, and *The Celestine Prophecy* has no tensor calculus to understand.

BRIEFLY NOTED

ROMANS: A NEW TRANSLATION WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY. By JOSEPH A. FITZMEYER, S.J. *Doubleday. 793 pp. $40.*

Fitzmeyer's new commentary on Romans is more than a commentary, it is an encyclopedia of the interpretation of Romans. His verse by verse exposition of the text is balanced and intelligent, and his scholarly asides fill in the reader on the wide range of opinion, ancient and modern, on how to understand the book. Indeed, what is most refreshing, and admirable, is that Fitzmeyer has read the traditional commentaries and regularly includes observations and citations from the church fathers and medievals. As his comments on Rom. 1:16-17 indicate, he knows that Romans has figured large in the history of Christian thought. This is a work of great learning and theological understanding, indispensable for any serious study of the book of Romans and of St. Paul.

— Robert L. Wilken

THE BURDENS OF SISTER MARGARET: PRIVATE LIVES IN A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CONVENT. By CRAIG HARLINE. *Doubleday. 359 pp. $24.*

Those anticipating a potentially lurid tale of sexual harassment and other assorted Perils of the Paulines will be disappointed. Despite its somewhat suggestive jacket cover and the tone of its beginning chapters, this book turns out to be a measured and carefully researched record of the lives of a few Grey Sisters in a Dutch convent in the early seventeenth century. From the unusually lengthy letters of a Sister Margaret Smulders and those of her contemporaries, the author has

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pieced together a detailed and occasionally fascinating account of the daily struggles and conflicts of the cloistered life.

— Kari Jenson Gold

A TREMOR OF BLISS: CONTEMPORARY WRITERS ON THE SAINTS. Edited by PAUL ELIE. *Harcourt Brace. 325 pp. $22.*

A beautiful idea nicely executed. The title is derived from the words of Becket in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral:* "I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper, and I would no longer be denied; all things proceed to a joyful consummation." After an introduction by Robert Coles, seventeen writers take on as many saints, including Francis of Assisi, Perpetua, Ignatius of Loyola, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Avila. Paul Baumann on St. Joseph and what it means to be a husband and Paul Elie on St. Thomas as our "twin" in doubting are especially effective. Notable, too, is Avery Dulles' appreciation of St. Robert Bellarmine, his patron and obviously his model as a theologian in service to the Church.

THE UNRELIEVED PARADOX: STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF FRANZ BIBFELDT. Edited by MARTIN E. MARTY and JERALD C. BRAUER. *Eerdmans. 231 pp. $14.99 paper.*

Back in the 1940s at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Martin Marty "discovered" the long-neglected work of Franz Bibfeldt, a Lutheran theologian of sorts. Since then his name and alleged bibliography have been insinuated into numerous library catalogues, and his "legacy" has even been the subject of a scholarly symposium at the American Academy of Religion, which is typically given to discussing less serious matters. A host of people more or less connected with the University of Chicago Divinity School have been tracking Bibfeldt's very trendy theological career, and here bring together sundry documentations and reflections on Bibfeldt as a template of the hilariously confused state of contemporary academic theology. If Bibfeldt is a joke, this is pushing it pretty far. If not, we're over the edge. A blurb on the jacket from an anonymous source describes the book as "an otherwise extraordinary achievement."

DICTIONARY OF FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY. Edited by RENE LATOURELLE and RINO FISICHELLA. *Crossroad. 1,222 pp. $75.*

A valuable addition to any theological library with ambitions. The editors and thirty-seven of the ninety-three contributors are associated with the Gregorian University in Rome, giving the volume a distinctly Catholic and, at times, Jesuit accent, but the reach is also ecumenical. In recent decades "fundamental theology" has been proposed as a replacement for what used to be called apologetics. Much in the present volume suggests that it is but another name for apologetics, which is not at all a bad thing.

REAL CHOICES. By FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN. *Multnomah (Sisters, Oregon). 257pp. $8.99 paper.*

FT author Mathewes-Green argues that pro-abortion is emphatically anti-woman. The present book, subtitled "Offering Practical Life-Affirming Alternatives to Abortion," is based on a research project conducted by the National Women's Coalition for Life, which claims 1.2 million members. Survey research suggests what most people rightly think they already know, that the overwhelming majority of women who have had abortions feel that they were forced to do so. It was most definitely not a choice. *Real Choices* could launch an entirely different movement—genuinely pro-choice and pro-woman.

FIRE FROM HEAVEN. By HARVEY COX. *Addison Wesley. 346 pp. $24.*

The ever enthusiastic Mr. Cox addresses "the rise of pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the Twenty-first Century." Visiting a number of contemporary pentecostal and charismatic groups, he joins in the excitements but worries that these folk have lost their eschatological fervor and are simply indulging themselves spiritually while getting on with their acquisitive bourgeois lives. On the other hand, he thinks it may be a good thing that they've lost their eschatological fervor since religious zealotry can do a lot of bad things. On the dust jacket Cox asks, "Why were so many wise and well-qualified people so demonstrably wrong when they predicted the imminent decline of religion?" Perhaps because many, not necessarily so wise, embraced Mr. Cox's also very enthusiastic pronouncement that there is no alternative to the secular city. In *Fire From Heaven* there's not much that many others have not often said, but it's bouncy and chock full of the ingenuous good will that makes Harvey Cox such a popular lecturer at the Harvard Divinity School.

AUGUSTINE: POLITICAL WRITINGS. Translated by DOUGLAS KRIES and MICHAEL W. TKACZ and edited by ERNEST L. FORTIN. *Hackett (P.O. Box 44937, Indianapolis, IN 46244). 262 pp. $9.95 paper.*

Large sections of *City of God* and many lesser writings are translated in a fashion more literary than is usual, with a fine overview of Augustine and politics by Ernest Fortin of Boston College. Of the readings and rereadings of Augustine there is no end, and very rightly so.

PUBLIC RELIGIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD. By JOSE CASANOVA. *University of Chicago Press. 320 pp. $17.95.*

The author, a sociologist at the New School in New York, displays an impressive grasp of the literature on secularization theory and religion, and entertains the notion that religion may now be in position to rescue the achievements of a modernity that was presumed to be necessarily secular. In this respect he agrees with a thesis advanced by R. J. Neuhaus and others, but then concludes by taking a curious "multi-

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cultural" turn suggesting that non-Western religions, rather than a resurgent Protestant evangelicalism and Catholicism, may save modernity. The end product of his argument strikes one as thoughtfully confused.

A HOUSE UNITED? EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS TOGETHER. By KEITH A. FOURNIER. *NavPress (Colorado Springs). 368 pp. $18.*

The subtitle is from the declaration published in the May 1994 issue of FT, and it is here reprinted in its entirety. Fournier, a Catholic and a lawyer, heads the American Center for Law and Justice, which is connected with the Christian Coalition. Foreword by Pat Robertson. The second subtitle is "A Winning Alliance for the 21st Century," so one knows that this is a book with a political attitude. *A House United?* runs the risk of exploiting religion for secular purposes, but the author convincingly contends that his primary concern is Christian unity. This popular tract is perhaps best understood as an exercise in ecumenism for conservative Christians, Catholic and evangelical, who are powerfully suspicious of ecumenism.

CONSIDERING *VERITATIS SPLENDOR*. Edited by JOHN WILKINS. *Pilgrim Press (Cleveland). 182 pp. $12.95 paper.*

Articles on the 1993 encyclical that were published in the *Tablet* (London). Some are almost hysterically negative (e.g., Bernard Häring), others are almost uncritically enthusiastic (e.g., Germain Grisez, John Finnis), a few are appreciatively nuanced (e.g., Maciej Zieba, Oliver O'Donovan), and yet others instruct the Pope on how he just doesn't get it (e.g., Richard McCormick, Joseph Fuchs, Lisa Sowle Cahill). Of twelve comments, five are mainly "for" and seven are mainly or totally "against," which is editorial balance of a sort.

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA. By JOSE IGNACIO TELLECHEA IDIGORAS. *Loyola University Press. 626 pp. $23.95 cloth, $12.95 paper.*

Father Tellechea's biography, subtitled "The Pilgrim Saint," has enjoyed considerable success in other languages and is now for the first time in English. Like Ignatius, Tellechea is Basque and that strongly informs his appreciation of the founder of the Society of Jesus who, in his view, is in many respects strikingly like Don Quixote, although, as it turns out, not so deluded. The narrative is burdened by ramblings and repetitions; it is a mark of the devotion of Fr. Cornelius Buckley that he translated all of it.

A Scansion

If I spoke any language other than
yours, I might be able to say it whole,
as a poem: *non-Hodgkins lymphoma.*
If my ears could hear sounds apart from years
of your wonder, I might delight in the
diagnosis: the alliteration
of *poor prognosis patient.* These are soft,
innocuous tones—tender syllables
in and of themselves. Were I moved by a
meter other than the beat of your heart,
I'd hear iambic run through the doctor's
order: *aggressive chemotherapy.*
I have tried to find a rhythm in the
in and out of liquids and needles. I
have tried to find a scheme in ups and downs
of vital signs. Surely there's meaning in
the pattern of sweats and bedpans, lumps and
catscans, coming and going for treatment.
I want to understand the metaphors in
transplants and *baldness,* in *fevers* and *pain.*
If I did not know so many of your
lines by heart, I would not falter over
these. I would stand up and read them aloud.

Mary M. Brown

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For Pam: A Benediction of the Air

In every presence there is absence.

When we're together, the spaces between
Threaten to enclose our bodies
And isolate our spirits.
The mirror reflects what we are not,
And we wonder if our mate
Suspects a fatal misreading
Of our original text,
Not to mention the dreaded subtext.
Reality, we fear, mocks appearance.
Or is trapped in a hall of mirrors
Where infinite regress prevents
A grateful egress. That is,
We can never know the meaning
Of being two-in-one,
Or if we are one-in-two.
What-I-Am is grieved at What-I'm-Not.
What-We-Should-Be is numbed by What-We-Are.

Yes, I'm playing word games
With the idea of marriage,
Musing over how even we can
Secularize Holy wedlock.
Or to figure it another way,
To wonder why two televisions
In the same house seem natural symbols
Of the family in decline.

Yet you are present to me now.
I sense you keenly, at work,
Bending red in face to reach
A last defiant spot of yellow
On those horrific kitchen cabinets.
Your honey hair flecked with paint;
Your large soft hidden breasts
Pushing down against your shirt.
The hemispheres of those buttocks
Curving into uncompromising hips.
To embrace you would be to take hold
Of my life in all its substance.

Without romance, I say that if
I were to deconstruct myself
And fling the pieces at random,
They would compose themselves
Into your shape.
But I guess that is romantic,
The old mystification—
Cramming two bodies
Into a single space.

Amen!

Our separation has taught me
That, dwelling in mind,
The corporeality
Of mates has spiritual mass
Which may be formulated:
Memory times desire over distance
Yields a bodying forth.
Thus I project into the
Deadly space between us
A corposant,
Pulsating a language
That will cleave to you
In the coolness of sleep
With insubstantiality
So fierce as to leave its dampness
On the morning sheets,
Or so gentle
As to fan your brow
While you paint the kitchen.
A body like a breath,
Whispering the axiom
By which all religions are blessed:

In every absence there is presence.

Bene
Bene
Benedictus.

John Williams

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

A Pope of the First Millennium at the Threshold of the Third

Hardly had heads stopped shaking in the publishing world over the astonishing sales of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in the United States (some three million copies in the first few months) than along comes *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Knopf put out more than eight million dollars for the American rights and pinned its promotional hopes on the Pope's planned visit to this country in October. When the trip was postponed to next year, executives at Knopf heard the sickening sound of millions of dollars going down the drain. In happy fact, however, *Crossing* immediately jumped to the top of the best-seller lists, with bookstores complaining that they couldn't get enough to meet the demand. It is now expected that the book will earn upward of fifty million dollars worldwide, all of it to be given to church-related charities.

There is something funny going on here. If you believe the prestige press, what we have in this book are disjointed philosophical and theological ramblings by a reactionary old man who heads an authoritarian institution that is lamentably out of touch with most Catholics and the entirety of the modern world. Insight into what is going on here begins with not believing the prestige press. Another way of understanding what is happening is proposed by the book's author: "We find ourselves faced with a new reality. The world, tired of ideology, is opening itself to the truth. The time has come when the splendor of this truth (*veritatis splendor*) has begun anew to illuminate the darkness of human existence." Some may think that excessively sanguine. The Pope's hopefulness, however, is in no way to be confused with optimism. Optimism is merely a matter of optics, of seeing what you want to see and not seeing what you don't want to see. The hope in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* is on the far side of a relentlessly realistic, indeed painfully bleak, understanding of the human circumstance. Which is to say that it is on the far side of the cross.

On the dust jacket, written in the Pope's hand, is "Be not afraid!" This, he notes, was the repeated greeting of the Risen Lord to his disciples. (Here and elsewhere, one is struck by the vibrant employment of numerous biblical passages, making the book, among many other things, an intriguing study in the ecclesial interpretation of Scripture.) "Be not afraid!" is the abiding message of the Church to the world, as it was also the theme of Karol Wojtyla's sermon upon being inaugurated as Pope John Paul II in 1978. The plea of the book, reflected in the title, is that we must not stop at the threshold of hope and faith and love. Be not afraid to cross the threshold, for Christ, having gone ahead, is waiting to receive us on the far side of our fears. The book is philosophical and theological, to be sure, but most of all it is a testament to a profound piety forged in pastoral experience and prayer.

An Open-Ended Conversation

Some pages more than others, but every page evinces the intelligence, the warmth, and the passion of an extraordinary Christian soul. I read this book within days of having had a long and very lively dinner with the Holy Father, and all that we talked about has been much on my mind as I have gone back again and again to *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. The best way I can describe the book is to say that it is very much like continuing an amiably earnest conversation over the dinner table for another ten or fifteen hours. It's not exactly *Everything You Wanted to Ask the Pope But Never Had the Chance*. It's better than that. There is a great deal that one might never have thought to ask but is essential to know if we are to understand this remarkable man and the faith that he proposes to us and to the world.

As most everybody knows, the genesis of the book was a plan to do an unprecedented worldwide television interview in October 1993, marking the

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fifteenth year of this pontificate. The interview didn't come off, but the Pope was much taken with the questions submitted by the scheduled interviewer, Vittorio Messori, a noted Italian journalist. And so, in moments snatched between innumerable obligations, John Paul began writing down his responses to the questions, and, if you keep writing things down that way, pretty soon you have what could very well be a book. At least the Pope thought so, and Joaquin Navarro-Valls, the Holy See's press director, thought so, and Leonardo Mondadori of the Mondadori publishing empire thought so, and now it seems that pretty much the whole world agrees.

Promotional hype to the contrary, it is not "unprecedented" for a Pope to publish a personal book that has no official standing. In the last sixteen years, this Pope has published several such books that have received little public attention. The new thing here is that he is responding directly to questions posed by a journalist, and they are questions of great interest to the general public. Another difference is the enormous financial investment that publishers have made in the book, combined, perhaps, with the reality of a world "opening itself to the truth." And, of course, while the book itself has no official status, it does provide invaluable insight into the thinking behind the many encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, and other official documents issuing from this pontificate.

In this commentary I will but touch on a few aspects of *Crossing* that bear upon matters of general interest, with particular reference to questions of concern to non-Catholics. Throughout the book there is a notable tone of modesty, both about his person and about the office he holds. To be sure, there is no trimming on the claims for the Petrine Ministry, but the accent is on the weakness and limits of Peter, and of the successors of Peter. Everything authentically Catholic, the Pope insists, must be understood Christocentrically, and Christ must be understood as the defining figure for all of humanity. He recognizes that the person of the Pope and the institution of the papacy is a puzzle and scandal for many. In response he cites Augustine, *Vobis sum episcopus, vobiscum christianus.* (For you I am a bishop; with you I am a Christian.) "On further reflection, *christianus* has far greater significance than *episcopus*, even if the subject is the Bishop of Rome."

Similarly Christocentric is the understanding of the Church. The institution of the Church is entirely at the service of the Gospel. He asserts that "the Church itself is first and foremost a 'movement,' a mission." "It is the mission that begins in God the Father and that, through the Son in the Holy Spirit, continually reaches humanity and shapes it in a new way." Elsewhere he suggests that the Church is a "protest movement," challenging all the principalities and powers opposed to the mission of Christ that is the Church. "What else are the sacraments (all of them!), if not the action of Christ in the Holy Spirit? When the Church baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes; when the Church absolves, it is Christ who absolves; when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, it is Christ who celebrates it: 'This is my body.' . . . All the sacraments are an action of Christ, the action of God in Christ." The foregoing is in response to Messori's observation that people are perplexed by the silence of God. In light of the continuing action of God in Christ, says John Paul, "it is truly difficult to speak of the silence of God. One must speak, rather, of the desire to stifle the voice of God."

Unity of Christians, Unity of Humankind

Repeatedly, the Pope returns to the question of ecumenism, and the connection between Christian unity and the unity of mankind. Those who have followed this pontificate with even moderate attentiveness know that there has never been the slightest question about the priority attached to ecumenism. On this score both traditionalist and progressivist Catholics have yet to catch up with the Pope. Traditionalists hesitate to cross the threshold and embrace ecumenism as an integral component of Catholic orthodoxy, while progressivists shrink back from the assertion that the only unity the Church can desire is unity in the truth. Divisions among Christians are a result of human sin, for sure, but John Paul suggests that something else, Someone else, has a hand in this. "Could it not be that these divisions have also been a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ's Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ? Perhaps all this wealth would not have come to light otherwise. . . ."

In this book and elsewhere, John Paul regularly makes reference to what the West has to learn from the Christian East, and it is no secret that the reconciliation of East and West is viewed as the primary ecumenical responsibility of Rome. But his reflections suggest that there is also a deeper understanding of the Gospel issuing from divisions in the West, between Rome and the communities that claim the legacy of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The healing of the breach between Rome and the Reformation requires an appreciation of a "certain dialectic" in how the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. "It is necessary for humanity to achieve unity through plurality, to learn to come together in the one Church, even while presenting a plurality of ways of thinking and acting, of cultures and civilizations." Divisions, then, may have served a purpose, but that does not justify continuing divisions that do not serve the truth. "The time must come for the love that unites us to be manifested! Many things lead us to believe that

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that time is now here. . . ."

The charge that the Lord Jesus gave to Peter makes ecumenism imperative. "The Petrine ministry is also a ministry of unity," and that is entirely consonant with the Lord's command to Peter, "Strengthen your brothers in faith." John Paul thinks it significant that these words were said just as Peter was about to deny Jesus. "It was as if the Master Himself wanted to tell Peter: 'Remember that you are weak, that you, too, need endless conversion. You are able to strengthen others only insofar as you are aware of your own weakness.'" Since the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has spoken many times about sins against Christian unity. But this note of repentance and confession is now struck with increased urgency.

At a consistory of cardinals last May, a draft program was proposed to prepare for the Jubilee Year 2000. The program reportedly emphasized the need for the Church to confess its sins, not only against Christian unity but also in events such as the Inquisition and the persecution of heretics and Jews. It is said the draft was not well received by many cardinals. If the Church is the Body of Christ, some worry, one must be careful in speaking about the Church being capable of sinning. While such cautions are legitimate, it will not do to speak merely about individual members of the Church sinning, as though the authoritative structures and institutions that define the Roman Catholic Church are not implicated in their actions. Some inexcusably bad things have been done by popes and cardinals and bishops and religious orders—all inextricably entangled with what is meant by the "Catholic Church." Beginning with his persistent reference to "the weakness of Peter," this Pope seems to be searching for the appropriate way to ensure that, at the threshold of the Third Millennium, the Church will be found on her knees seeking for herself the forgiveness she declares to others. For Christians and for the world, it is thought, there must be something like an act of universal repentance and absolution if we are to walk upright into the Third Millennium. What such an act (or acts) might be remains unclear, but this Pope clearly intends to be with us in crossing that threshold, and in a November letter he had more to say about how we might cross it more fully united as forgiven sinners. In that letter, John Paul said that the Church must "become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ" and thus "sullied the face [of the Church]."

No Salvation Outside Christ

The concern for Christian unity inevitably comes up against what some view as Rome's exclusivist claims to being, quite simply and without remainder, the Church of Christ. As is evident in a chapter of particular ecumenical interest ("Is Only Rome Right?"), that is not what the Catholic Church claims. "Outside the Church there is no salvation," John Paul suggests, is another way of stating the "revealed truth that there is salvation only and exclusively in Christ." Here he weaves a rich tapestry of biblical texts and the teaching of the Council that "The Church is in Christ as a sacrament, or a sign and instrument, of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race." To be saved is to be brought into the most intimate life of God, "into the Mystery of the Divine Trinity."

This happens in the Church but that "cannot be understood by looking exclusively at the visible aspect of the Church." The Pope does not put it quite this way, but the implication is that, where this incorporation into the life of God happens, where salvation happens, there is the Church. The Church, he says, "is far from proclaiming any kind of ecclesiocentrism. Its teaching is Christocentric in all of its aspects, and therefore it is profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Trinity." Christ and the Church, one is invited to think, are coterminous. There are various levels and spheres of communion with the Church as it is most fully and rightly expressed in the Roman Catholic Church, but, in the final analysis, to say that there is no salvation outside the Church is another way of saying that there is no salvation outside Christ. This does not mean that only Christians can be saved. As the Pope turns to the question of world religions and the many who are not Christians, it appears that there are many who do not know the name of Christ who nonetheless are not outside Christ.

Asked why there are so many religions, John Paul refers, as he does regularly throughout this book, to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The several parts of that teaching must be kept in play. One part is that the "Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions." Because truth and holiness are from God, all the many evidences of truth and holiness are of a piece, for God is one. In other religions can be found *semina Verbi* (seeds of the Word); their doctrines can "reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men," that truth being Christ. The Church "is bound to proclaim that Christ is 'the way and the truth and the life.'" Whatever truth and holiness is to be found anywhere finds its fulfillment in Christ, through whom God has reconciled everything to Himself. In considering the many ways of religion in the world, both past and present, we can affirm, says John Paul, that "Christ came into the world for all these peoples. He redeemed them all and has His own ways of reaching each of them in the present eschatological phase of salvation history."

As generous as he obviously wishes to be to all, the Pope offers rather sharp strictures with respect to, for instance, Buddhism and Islam. Buddhism, with

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its disdain for and detachment from the world, has some similarity to varieties of Christian mysticism, but such Christian mysticism "begins at the point where the reflections of Buddha end." The Christian goal is not nirvana but perfect incorporation into the life of the Triune God. Islam is similarly limited: "Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Koran, but He is ultimately a God outside of the world, a God who is only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God-with-us. Islam is not a religion of redemption. There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection. . . . For this reason not only the theology but also the anthropology of Islam is very distant from Christianity."

While the Pope stresses the requirement of respect for what is true and holy in all religions, it is when he comes to Judaism that respect is clearly joined to deep affection. Here are our "elder brothers in the faith," a phrase John Paul has employed innumerable times. In the chapter devoted to Judaism, he recalls childhood experiences in Poland and the unspeakable crimes of the Nazi period. As Pope he has met frequently with Jewish groups, and he was the first Pope to worship at the great synagogue in Rome. At one such meeting a Jewish leader said, "I want to thank the Pope for all that the Catholic Church has done over the last two thousand years to make the true God known." Some Jewish thinkers have suggested that Christianity is Judaism for the Gentiles, the way in which the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has, through Jesus, extended the covenant to the nations.

While not subscribing to that formulation, John Paul proposes a heightened sense of alertness to the mysterious and continuing bond between Christian and Jew. Israel and the Church are "two great moments of divine election," and they "are drawing closer together." What is said about the unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism does not detract from but is based upon Jesus the Christ as the fulfillment of God's promise. "The New Covenant," says John Paul, "has its roots in the Old. The time when the people of the Old Covenant will be able to see themselves as part of the New is, naturally, a question to be left to the Holy Spirit. We, as human beings, try only not to put obstacles in the way." Twice he notes the significance of the fact that the Church's dialogue with Jews is conducted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, whereas dialogue with other religions is under different curial auspices. This reflects a recognition that a singular measure of unity already exists between those who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus.

John Paul is not much taken with the effluence of religiosities that appear under the banner of New Age. This, he suggests, is but another instance of the return of ancient gnosticism, the idea that liberation from the real world can be achieved by the adepts of a superior "gnosis" or "spiritual consciousness." The Pope observes, "Gnosticism never completely abandoned the realm of Christianity. Instead, it has always existed side by side with Christianity, sometimes taking the shape of a philosophical movement, but more often assuming the characteristics of a religion or para-religion in distinct, if not declared, conflict with all that is essentially Christian." Here and elsewhere, the heart of what is essentially Christian is Christ—the Word of God incarnate, redeeming the human project and drawing it to its completion in the life of the Holy Trinity. In this view, Judaism and Christianity—unlike Buddhism, Islam, and other traditions—understand creation and redemption in historical continuity; the accent of hope is not on salvation from the world but on the salvation of the world. In support, he repeatedly cites John 3:16, "For God so loved the world . . ."

To Keep Conscience on Guard

Speaking of salvation invites reflection on damnation. In some forms of piety to be found among both Protestants and Catholics, salvation is defined almost exclusively by reference to damnation. To be saved is to be snatched from hell, which is the destination of the generality of humankind. This is not the sensibility of John Paul, who, with early fathers of the Church and the continuing tradition of Orthodoxy, emphasizes the cosmic nature of a redemption that is directed toward the fulfillment of man in the life of God, indeed toward *theosis* or deification. Nonetheless the Pope is concerned about preachers and catechists who "no longer have the courage to preach the threat of hell. And perhaps even those who listen to them have stopped being afraid of hell."

He sympathetically recognizes that the undeniably biblical teaching about hell has been a problem for great Christian thinkers from Origen in the third century to Hans Urs von Balthasar in the twentieth. After all, it is clearly God's will that "all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2). Or, as John Paul puts the question, "Can God, who has loved man so much, permit the man who rejects Him to be condemned to eternal torment?" He answers, "And yet, the words of Christ are unequivocal." In Matthew 25, for example, Christ speaks clearly about those who will go to eternal punishment. So who is in hell? "The Church has never made any pronouncement in this regard. This is a mystery, truly inscrutable, which embraces the holiness of God and the conscience of man. The silence of the Church is, therefore, the only appropriate position for Christian faith. Even when Jesus says of Judas, 'It would be better for that man if he had never been born,' His words do not allude for certain to eternal damnation."

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It is the case, however, that "there is something in man's moral conscience" that rebels against the loss of the doctrine of hell. After all, the God who is Love is also ultimate Justice. Reflecting on those who are responsible for creating "hells on earth," one must ask: "Can He tolerate these terrible crimes, can they go unpunished? Isn't final punishment in some way necessary in order to reestablish moral equilibrium in the complex history of humanity? Is not hell in a certain sense the ultimate safeguard of man's moral conscience?" Among some Protestants there is considerable anxiety that the Catholic Church teaches "universalism," the doctrine that all will ultimately be saved, or even Pelagianism, the heresy that it is possible to be saved without the grace of God in Christ. John Paul goes to some pains to clarify these questions.

He notes that ancient councils of the Church rejected the theory of a final *apocatastasis* according to which all would finally be saved and hell abolished. Yet one gathers he does not disagree with von Balthasar, who, in a famous essay by that title, asked, "Dare one hope that all will be saved?" The answer would seem to be that one may so hope—perhaps even that one must so hope—while not denying the abiding alternative to salvation, which is damnation. As for Pelagianism, his interviewer asks whether one cannot live "an honest, upright life even without the Gospel." John Paul: "I would respond that if a life is truly upright it is because the Gospel, not known and therefore not rejected on a conscious level, is in reality already at work in the depths of the person who searches for the truth with honest effort and who willingly accepts it as soon as it becomes known to him. Such willingness is, in fact, a manifestation of grace at work in the soul. The spirit blows where He will and as He wills (John 3). The freedom of the Spirit meets the freedom of man and fully confirms it." In sum, there is no salvation apart from the grace of God in Christ. Even those who have never heard of Christ are, if they are saved, saved because of Christ. (For a fuller discussion of these matters see my commentary on *Redemptoris Missio*, the encyclical on Christian missionary work, "Reviving the Missionary Mandate," FT, October 1991.)

Behold the Man!

But this discussion may give the misleading impression that *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* is an exercise in systematic theology. There is theological reflection, of course, but in the main it is an unabashedly personal disclosure of how this Pope understands himself, his office, the responsibilities of the Church, and, above all, the strange ways of God with man. There is much on his devotion to Mary and why the typology of male and female is essential to understanding Christ and his bride, the Church. Some readers will find the most affecting parts of the book to be the autobiographical reflections, especially on his abiding concern for young people. He says, "As a young priest I learned to love human love." Such human love, rightly ordered, is on a continuum with the love of God, His for us and ours for Him.

This continuum of the life of God and the life of man is at the heart of all of John Paul's thinking. This is the humanism in his "prophetic humanism." He never tires of repeating that the revelation of God in Christ is the revelation of God to man but also the revelation of man to himself. Citing Blaise Pascal he says, "Only in transcending himself does man become fully human." (*Apprenez que l'homme passe infiniment l'homme.*) This truth is demonstrated by Christ in his love that is perfectly ordered to the Father in the power of the Spirit. Thus Christ has "touched the intimate truth of man." "He has touched it first of all with His Cross. Pilate, who pointing to the Nazarene crowned with thorns after his scourging said, 'Behold, the man!', did not realize that he was proclaiming an essential truth, expressing that which always and everywhere remains the heart of evangelization."

John Paul is impatient with sociological analyses of spiritual realities. The Church does not march to statistical calculations but to the songs of Zion. At the same time, he does not shrink from offering his own assessment of the Church's circumstance at the edge of the Third Millennium. "If the post-conciliar Church has difficulties in the area of doctrine and discipline, these difficulties are not serious enough to present a real threat of new divisions. The Church of the Second Vatican Council . . . truly serves this world in a variety of ways and presents itself as the true Body of Christ, as the minister of His saving and redemptive mission, as the promoter of justice and peace." As the major transnational community, the Church is a force also in international affairs. "Not everyone is comfortable with this force, but the Church continues to repeat with the Apostles: 'It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4)."

Tom Burns, former editor of the *Tablet* (London), catches the feel of the book very nicely. "To write of John Paul II as a pontiff of the first millennium is not to say that he is an anachronism, but on the contrary that the radicalism of that time, when grace struck its roots into nature, when the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church, and mankind had to choose between stark alternatives, has come round full circle. The most modern of all popes recalls the most distant in time: 'Against the spirit of the world, the Church takes up anew each day a struggle that is none other than the struggle for the world's soul. . . . The struggle for the soul of the contemporary world is at its height when the spirit of the world seems strongest'—words that might have been spoken in the catacombs of ancient Rome." At

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the threshold of the Third Millennium, they are words of invitation to cross the threshold of hope.

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RUSSIA: WILDERNESS YEARS AHEAD

For many evangelical Protestants in this country, post-Communist Russia is a vast mission field ripe unto the harvest. Russian Orthodoxy, however divided and dispirited by its years of subservience to political dictatorship, is strongly united in opposing the "invasion" by Western Christians. And, of course, it is not only the evangelicals who are resented. Much more deep-seated in the soul of Orthodoxy is a suspicion of the designs of Rome. As we have observed in these pages, there is today a sense of heightened expectation regarding the reconciliation of Rome and the churches of the East. But the obstacles to bringing together what was formally sundered in 1054 are still formidable.

A German writer, Barbara von der Heydt, has been examining the spiritual and cultural commotions in Russia and offers her findings in "Russia's Spiritual Wilderness" (*Policy Review*). Since his return to Russia, the great Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has been portrayed in the Western press as an ineffectual old man whose prophetic rantings have been largely ignored by the Russian people. In fact, the article by von der Heydt suggests, more people may be listening than those press accounts allow. Although not always so simply stated, Solzhenitsyn's message is simple: the past sufferings and present ills of Russia are attributable to the fact that "men forgot God." While Orthodoxy will have to play the primary role in any moral and spiritual rejuvenation of Russia, this requires that Orthodoxy itself undergo significant changes. Although generally unknown in the West, Orthodoxy has a glorious history of martyrs in this century. Under communism, many thousands of bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and lay people were killed for their Christian witness. The celebration of the Russian martyrs is a source of spiritual renewal, but at the same time it raises awkward questions about current church leaders who, with few exceptions, collaborated with the Evil Empire.

There are other problems. Von der Heydt spoke with Mikhail Dmitriev, a political reformer battling the nationalistic forces of imperial revanchism. "Despite his own agnosticism, Dmitriev claims that the only way to reform Russia, which he calls a 'profoundly atheistic society,' is to restore Christian values. But he makes the point that Orthodox values are pre-Reformation values, which are counter to markets and capitalism, condemning the accumulation of wealth and forbidding the taking of interest. 'The Reformation never reached Russia, and this is the attitude which controls their attitudes to economic behavior. Orthodox values are not compatible with real market values.' As reformers move ahead in the transition, some significant elements of the Russian Orthodox Church perceive a loss of Russian national identity in the Westernizing reforms, and therefore oppose them. Dmitriev concludes Russia needs an infusion of Protestantism into Orthodox thinking on the market."

The Russian Orthodox are not likely to welcome the suggestion that they need to learn from Western Protestants. Yet, unlike both Protestants and Catholics in the West, Orthodoxy had no occasion to develop, either conceptually or practically, the ways of coping with the often troubling dynamics of democracy and the free market. Under communism, Orthodoxy was a fragile refuge from the world. Now it is being called upon to restore the moral character of a people who see only confusion, chaos, and the ascendancy of a gangster elite beyond the reach of any legal or moral authority. Von der Heydt's conclusion is sobering: "As daunting as the economic and political tasks are, reforming the character of the nation's soul is far harder yet. But in the absence of such a moral transformation, there can be no lasting economic or political reform. The destruction of the Russian soul was so devastating that it will take years for the country to find its compass. A free and stable Russia cannot emerge immediately. Indeed, it may take more than a generation. The children of Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness, unlearning the traits of slavery in Egypt before entering the Promised Land. Russians may be entering their wilderness years in their exodus from the slavery of communism."

FT

CAPITALISM AND THE KINDNESS THAT KILLS

Perhaps every author knows the lurking fear that somewhere in the book manuscript is an error so gross that it will cast a shadow over the entirety of his argument. Something inadvertent of course, a case of meaning to say one thing but having, most embarrassingly, said another. So one asks friends to go over the manuscript and hopes—in today's publishing world it is usually a vain hope—that an

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editor will also be paying attention. In this connection our sympathy to Andrew Kimbrell, author of *The Human Body Shop* (reviewed by Bernard Nathanson in FIRST THINGS, December 1993). This memorable howler in the very first paragraph of the very first chapter survived into the second edition. Kimbrell is discussing the sacred meanings traditionally associated with blood. Then this: "Blood also plays a central role in the Christian sacramental traditions, where it is transformed into wine and consumed as the essence of life, the very presence of 'the living God.'" Reverse transubstantiation, so to speak.

Regrettably, this is not the only howler in a book that is otherwise useful and should have made more of an impact than it has. Kimbrell provides an extended survey of deeply troubling developments in the exchange and sale of human body parts, the "commodification" of the body itself, and the reckless experiments now under way that are accelerating our civilizational slide into the horrors of eugenics that most people thought, wrongly, had been forever discredited by the Third Reich. For those who are morally uneasy about having been sleeping well lately, we warmly recommend the bedtime reading of *The Human Body Shop*.

As Nathanson pointed out, however, Kimbrell weakens his argument by proposing that we merely regulate, or submit to further public discussion, some practices that, if not effectively prohibited, are inherently unregulatable. For instance, he urges "a moratorium on the use of induced-abortion fetuses for transplantation and research until the profound ethical and legal problems surrounding this practice are fully discussed and resolved." The difficulty is that those who engage in this practice think that the profound questions, if there are any, have been fully discussed and resolved, while those who disagree deem the practice evil beyond discussion. Kimbrell's proposal puts one in mind of the observation that when you come across an article titled "Whither Incest?" you somehow know that it is not going to be a vigorous defense of traditional morality.

Similarly, Kimbrell says we should not permit the creation of new species by putting human genes into animals "until there has been a full public debate on the issue and the ethical and environmental consequences of the genetic engineering of animals are better understood." Whither Humanoids?

Kimbrell's urgently important warnings would have been enhanced by the omission of the concluding chapters that attempt to explain what has brought us to the present unhappy pass in which eugenic practices threaten what C. S. Lewis called "the abolition of man." According to Kimbrell, it is all the fault of modernity; more specifically it is the fault of Enlightenment rationality; and most specifically it is the fault of capitalism. Echoing the apocalyptic assault on modernity in Jeremy Rifkin's foreword to the book (Kimbrell works for Rifkin's Foundation on Economic Trends), the author depicts Adam Smith as the serpent in the garden who seduced the modern world into embracing "the gospel of greed." He writes, "In [Smith's] system there are no ethical choices to be made, only utilitarian judgments exercised by each individual pursuing his or her own material self-interest." One wonders from what leftist tracts Mr. Kimbrell has derived his understanding of intellectual history. (We are told that Mr. Kimbrell is, in fact, a "distributionist" in the mode of Chesterton and Belloc. Unfortunately, in the present book his polemic is largely indistinguishable from that of vulgar Marxists.) He also writes that today countries everywhere are turning away from market economics to a greater reliance upon social control. One wonders what newspapers he reads. As with transubstantiation, his history seems to have gone into reverse.

To be fair, perhaps Kimbrell does not know that Adam Smith was, above all, a moral philosopher, the author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and a proponent of market exchange within the constraints of moral culture. (For a splendid account of Smith's work, see Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours* [reviewed in FIRST THINGS by Michael Novak, August/September 1993].) Kimbrell calls for replacing democratic capitalism with what he calls the politics and economics of "empathy." But surely C. S. Lewis already marked that trap for us, as did Walker Percy in novels such as *Love in the Ruins* and, especially, *Thanatos*. The movements for abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, and related practices are all motored by the engine of empathy. Percy's hero-priest in *Thanatos* calls it the kindness that kills. The advocacy of the culture of death is riddled with the rhetoric of empathy, compassion, and caring. Creating an efficient market for the sale of body parts, relieving the radically handicapped of lives not worth living, engineering babies that will be more lovable and therefore, presumably, more loved—it is kindness all the way.

There is a great deal that is wrong with capitalism, even when one specifies *democratic* capitalism, as there is a great deal wrong with everything human. The Rifkin-Kimbrell attack on the free economy may win them friends on the left, and recruits for the resistance to the engineering and marketing of human life are to be welcomed, no matter how ideologically misguided they may be on other questions. The same might be said of their romantic celebration of environmentalism as the alternative to modernity. Ecofreaks Against Eugenics may be doing the right thing for the wrong reason, but allies do not come made to order.

A serious intellectual response to the evils vividly reported by Kimbrell, however, begins with the knowledge that there is no desirable alternative to

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modernity and the market economy. Neither modernity nor the market are acceptable as they are; both are subject to change and will change, for better and for worse. These are truisms. How they change depends in largest part upon factors that transcend economics and the dynamics that are presumably inherent to the abstraction called modernity. This is the wisdom of Pope John Paul's encyclical on political economy, *Centesimus Annus*. With Rifkin-Kimbrell, John Paul understands that persons are not property and that many things must not be subjected to the forces of the market. Unlike Rifkin-Kimbrell, he knows that our hope lies not in railing against modernity and capitalism but in making and effectively implementing clear moral judgments. The Pope calls for a restoration of politics as moral deliberation.

The fault lies not in the great systemic evil of everything that has happened since the Enlightenment; the fault lies in ourselves. The perils rightly deplored by Mr. Kimbrell are not so much, as he contends, the result of technological breakthroughs; they are much more the result of cultural breakdowns. We can say No, and we can make politically and legally effective arguments for saying No. Of course we may fail, but then history comes with no guarantees—except its happy consummation in the Kingdom of God. But about this we should be clear: If warding off the evils described in *The Human Body Shop* depends upon reversing modernity, our chances are similar to those of turning blood into wine. And then we are back to debating "Whither Incest?"

FT

THE CULT OF VIOLENCE

Out in Hollywood, but not only there, Gerry Adams of the Irish Republican Army has been lionized by Americans on the two visits that the Clinton Administration, much to the consternation of Great Britain, has permitted him to make to this country. (The general rule is that terrorists are denied visas.) As of this writing, the cease-fire between the IRA and its Protestant opponents in Northern Ireland is still holding. Perhaps it will lead to some kind of lasting peace, but that does not change the fact that Adams is a very violent man with a history of involvement in the murders of dozens of innocent men, women, and children.

The *Spectator* notes editorially that violence is not just in Mr. Adams' past. "Only recently, he has commented nonchalantly that the penalty for informing on the IRA is death. There is no trial or appeal for a man suspected of being an informer. He is simply eliminated by a bullet in the back of the head. The admirers of Mr. Adams in New York and Detroit who express so much outrage at what British lawyers and judges did to the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six should consider how the IRA continues to treat people it suspects of talking out of turn. There are no Hollywood movies to be made about them, no biographies, no appeal funds—whether they were innocent or guilty, the fact is that they are now all dead. That is Gerry Adams' version of justice."

Simon Jenkins of the London *Times* reflects on a Hollywood birthday party given Gerry Adams by Martin Sheen, Oliver Stone, Tom Hayden, and other luminaries. "What gives Mr. Adams his glamour is not his present link with peace but his past link with violence. That is what gave a thrilling tingle to 'Happy Birthday, dear Gerry.' For those who make a living faking violence, a practitioner of the real thing has magnetism. Malcolm X and the Black Panthers enjoyed similar West Coast status. Gangsters, mafiosi, and convicted murderers have, I am told, great sexual appeal to certain women. If Jack the Ripper were alive today, Hollywood would not just buy his story (we would all do that), but would want to meet him, embrace him, feel his physical proximity. Using violence as a dramatic catharsis is one thing. Actors need an occasional first-hand encounter. I am sure Oliver Stone is even now working up a script *Gerry Adams, the Movie*, with guest footage of Mother Teresa, Steve Biko, and Martin Luther King."

FT

MORAL THEOLOGY AT ITS PIQUE

The slash-and-burn style of attack is more typically found in tabloids or in the editorial section of the *New York Times* than in scholarly theological journals, but Father Richard McCormick of the University of Notre Dame was het up, and the editors of *Theological Studies* gave him free rein. In the September 1994 issue he has a very long commentary on "Some Early Reactions to *Veritatis Splendor*." Readers will recall that that 1993 encyclical made the case for the Christian vocation, indeed the human vocation, to holiness, which vocation requires a clear distinction between good and evil. In the course of making that argument, the encyclical is critical of "certain moral theologians" who seem to fudge the difference between good and evil, leading

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to a confusion in which evil is called good and good evil. These theological approaches are sometimes described as "proportionalist" or "consequentialist," and most accent an understanding of "fundamental option" in which it is suggested that a person's general orientation to the good, rather than specific acts, is what really matters.

It is generally thought that Fr. McCormick is among the theologians whom the Pope had in mind in *Veritatis Splendor*. Certainly Fr. McCormick thinks that. Others associated with the views that are criticized include Charles Curran, Bernard Häring, Louis Janssens, and, probably the most influential, Josef Fuchs. Fr. McCormick feels strongly that the criticism of him and his colleagues is most unfair. McCormick surveys some of the published responses to *Veritatis Splendor* in this country and elsewhere, including the January 1994 symposium in FT. With embarrassing predictability and absence of nuance, he announces his discovery that those who praise the encyclical are either confused or ignorant while those who attack it are insightful, bold, and right on target. As in *The Mikado*, Fr. McCormick has a little list, and on his list one is either a bad guy or good guy, depending chiefly, it seems, on one's attitude toward McCormick and Friends. At least in drawing up his list, Fr. McCormick evidences a refreshing insistence upon absolute right and wrong. Those who agree with him are absolutely right and those who disagree are absolutely wrong.

Certainly Fr. McCormick does not let the Pope off easy. We are told that the encyclical "is prolix and repetitious, its analyses too frequently obscure and convoluted, and its presentation of revisionist tendencies tendentious, extreme, and ultimately inaccurate." And, if that were not enough, it is also "acrimonious"—acrimony being something that Fr. McCormick most particularly deplores. Commenting on the FT symposium, Fr. McCormick notes that Stanley Hauerwas, David Burrell, and this writer are hopelessly confused, while Robert George of Princeton is guilty of misrepresenting the proportionalists, his guilt being mitigated only by his ignorance of the relevant literature. Hadley Arkes of Amherst is so dull-witted that he delivers "an analytic howler," actually agreeing with the revisionists when he thinks he is disagreeing. And so Fr. McCormick goes on, and on, in his pique against the prolix, repetitious, tendentious, and acrimonious.

Nonetheless, the reader may find it worthwhile to try to rescue the germ of an argument from Fr. McCormick's excited execrations. Those who have read McCormick over the years will welcome here his insistence that he really does believe in moral absolutes, that there are some things that are intrinsically—always and everywhere—evil. It is noteworthy also that he rejects the claim of critics that he and his revisionist associates want to advance an "accommodation with the spirt [sic] of the age." Readers of McCormick and his colleagues have apparently been misled all this time by their endlessly repeated contention that received teaching must be revised in response to the putative needs and improved understandings of the contemporary world.

Welcome and refreshing also is Fr. McCormick's brief comment on "the positive value" of *Veritatis Splendor*. "The encyclical directs its fire against the assumptions of the liberal society: absence of any sense of an objective moral order; the assertion of freedom over truth; conscience seen as the creator of moral law. This is right on target." One must guard, however, against being too impressed by Fr. McCormick's praise for parts of the encyclical. How to put this delicately? While it is surely with commendable effort that Fr. McCormick brings himself to acknowledge that this execrable encyclical is not without some merit, his concessions are not of such weight as to warrant a hermeneutical shift in the interpretation of his voluminous contributions to the contemporary state of moral theology.

Intentions and Acts

Fr. McCormick and others who sense that they are the objects of the Pope's reproach protest that their work has been "caricatured," "misrepresented," and "distorted." It is one of the less lovely aspects of their protest that they almost never suggest that they have been misunderstood, and that perhaps they are, at least partially, responsible for the misunderstanding. Against the "misrepresentation" and "caricature" found in *Veritatis Splendor*, Fr. McCormick insists that proportionalism never attempts to justify morally wrong actions by reference to a good intention. "If an act is morally wrong, nothing can justify it," he says in a manner that seems quite unequivocal.

So very much turns on that "if," however. One must inquire as to whether what seems to be an unequivocal formulation is in fact no more than a tautology: If an act is morally wrong, it is morally wrong. But consider: If an act that might otherwise be deemed morally wrong is done with a right intention, then it is not morally wrong. One can agree with the latter formulation without offending at all against the proposition that "If an act is morally wrong, nothing can justify it." In short, that apparently unequivocal proposition turns out to be strikingly contingent.

In dealing with specific acts, the classical moral literature takes into account factors such as object, circumstance, intention, and motive. These terms are not always used in the same way; not even, according to some distinguished scholars, by Thomas Aquinas. Fr. McCormick insists that intention is not an add-on, it is not something in addition to what constitutes the act in question. He

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says flatly, "The intention makes the act what it is." Here Fr. McCormick proposes a sharp distinction between intention and motive. A motive may be something extraneous to the act, something added to it. Then his formulation would seem to read: If an act is morally wrong as determined by its intention, nothing, including a worthy motive, can justify it.

Nobody in the discussion, past or present, has suggested that intention cannot contribute significantly to defining an act—to making the act what it is. Fr. McCormick employs a homely example. "For instance, handing money to another can be a variety of different things: payment of a debt, a loan, a gift, an alms, a bribe, etc. It is not possible to determine the morality of an action prior to determining what is objectively willed in it." The example is homely, obvious, and irrelevant. The very act of handing money to another person has never been morally censured, never mind condemned as intrinsically evil. To understand what is happening in a specific instance of someone handing money to another one would of course have to know the intention. But what about having sexual relations with someone who is not one's spouse? Is such an act intrinsically wrong? One has but to apply Fr. McCormick's above-stated rule, "It is not possible to determine the morality of an action prior to determining what is objectively willed in it."

The teaching of *Veritatis Splendor* is that such an act of sexual intercourse is intrinsically wrong, always and everywhere. There may be mitigating circumstances that would reduce the measure of culpability or guilt. One thinks, for example, of the extreme example in *Sophie's Choice*, in which a woman commits adultery in order to save her child from the gas chambers. But the degree of culpability or guilt does not affect the wrongness of the act. The act cannot be made right; it can only be forgiven. At yet another point, Fr. McCormick proposes what would seem to be a clear and firm principle: "Once an action is said to be morally wrong, nothing can justify it." Well yes, and it follows that, if an act is not said to be morally wrong, it needs no justification. It all depends, does it not, on who does the saying. What seems to be firm in Fr. McCormick's assertions too often turns out to be flaccid almost beyond moral usefulness.

Understandable Misunderstandings

Consider McCormick's description of the project of Fr. Josef Fuchs, the very influential figure whom McCormick believes the Pope has caricatured and misrepresented. Fuchs argues, says McCormick, "that it is a mistake to expect the Bible to lay out rights and wrongs in detail. Rather the Bible, especially the New Testament, aids our discernment in a different way. It provides a new and deeper understanding of the human person, of our vocation in Christ, of our being led by the Spirit, of our personal worth, etc. It is in such matters that the Church finds its original teaching function in moral matters." Surely the teaching of the Bible and the Church provides all these wonderful things, and much more. But does not that teaching also "lay out rights and wrongs"? Forget the distracting words "in detail." The question is not whether God's revelation is in detail but whether it is specific. Is it a mistake to think that the Bible proposes—and that it is therefore the responsibility of the Church to teach—that there are specific acts that are intrinsically wrong? McCormick, Fuchs, and others seem to be saying Yes. Even with the best good will and giving them every benefit of the doubt, there would appear to be no other way of understanding them. Nonetheless, it is possible that their critics have misunderstood them and, dare one suggest, it is possible that they are at least partially responsible for that misunderstanding.

The reader may find it of interest to compare the assertions of *Veritatis Splendor* with statements by, for example, the estimable preceptor of the revisionists, Fr. Josef Fuchs. The following is from section 37 of the encyclical:

"Some people . . . disregarding the dependence of human reason on Divine Wisdom . . . have actually posited a 'complete sovereignty of reason' in the domain of moral norms regarding the right ordering of life in this world. Such norms would constitute the boundaries of a merely 'human' morality that would be the expression of a law which man in an autonomous manner lays down for himself and which has its source exclusively in human reason. In no way could God be considered the Author of this law, except in the sense that human reason exercises its autonomy in setting down laws by virtue of a primordial and total mandate given to man by God. These trends of thought have led to a denial, in opposition to Sacred Scripture (cf. Matthew 15:3-6) and the Church's constant teaching, of the fact that the natural moral law has God as its author, and that man, by the use of reason, participates in the eternal law, which it is not for him to establish. . . . [This way of thinking] has led to an actual denial that there exists, in Divine Revelation, a specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent. The word of God would be limited to proposing an exhortation . . . which the autonomous reason alone would then have the task of completing with normative directives which are truly 'objective,' that is, adapted to the concrete historical situation."

To the Sources

Fr. McCormick charges that that is a misrepresentation, distortion, and caricature of what he and his fellow revisionists have proposed. But it seems very close to, if not identical with, his own description of Fuchs' view cited above. In inquiring

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whether revisionists teach what *Veritatis Splendor* says they teach, there are hundreds upon hundreds of volumes that might be consulted. Since nobody will suggest that Josef Fuchs is unrepresentative of the view that Richard McCormick defends, however, it is possibly sufficient to limit ourselves at the moment to Fr. Fuchs and his recent book, *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations* (Georgetown University Press, 1993). Herewith a number of quotes that would seem to be pertinent:

"What is presented as 'ethical natural law,' and therefore as the order of creation and God's will, is always, and necessarily, an attempt at interpretation, evaluation, and ethical judgment that cannot be simply 'read off' from nature and the heart. Therefore it always retains the character of an attempt, and does not generally compel one to see in it absolutely the one possible attempt and conditional judgment that always holds true. (page 25) . . . A moral judgment about right ethical conduct cannot be deduced from what is given in nature, but can be found through human, rational, evaluative reflection within human reality as a whole. (33) . . . God's universal sovereignty is transcendent, not merely in the world, and is not, therefore, in competition with human rights. It follows that it is a fallacy to say that only God, not persons, may make decisions about [sexual morality]. . . . One cannot therefore deduce, from God's relationship to creation, what the obligation of the human person is in these areas or in the realm of creation as a whole. (39) . . . Neither the Hebrew Bible nor the New Testament produces statements that are independent of culture and thus universal and valid for all time; nor can these statements be given by the church or its magisterium. Rather, it is the task of human beings—of the various persons who have been given the requisite intellectual capacity—to investigate what can and must count as a conviction about these responsibilities." (55)

But enough. It does seem very much like, indeed indistinguishable from, what John Paul says "some people" teach. Similar statements, in fact nearly identical statements, can be found almost beyond number in the writings of Curran, Häring, Janssens, and their numerous disciples, and not least in the writings of Richard McCormick. Of course almost everybody is unfairly criticized at times, but one wonders why these writers protest so vociferously when their positions are calmly and accurately presented. After all, the reader has only to open their books to find out what they have said.

Of course a theologian is understandably and rightly troubled when criticized by church authority. One can confidently say that most of those challenged by *Veritatis Splendor* do very seriously intend to "think with the Church" and faithfully present her teachings. When a theologian encounters official criticism or thinks he may be the target of such criticism, surely the first instinct should be to ask whether the criticism is just. If he believes the criticism is unjust, there are ways to explain his position more fully and, in the course of doing so, help church authority to articulate its own position more adequately. All of this has been helpfully spelled out in recent years in an instruction from the Vatican titled, "The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian." What does not make much sense in response to censure is to claim that one has not said what one has said, repeatedly. The books are out there, and presumably the authors intended that they should be read. Reading an author's books should not be construed as a hostile act.

The Issue Behind the Issues

The intention that informs Fr. McCormick's committing this article in *Theological Studies* is helpfully clarified when he comes to what he calls "the issue behind other issues: ecclesiology." He notes that many people admire this Pope for taking a firm moral stand in a world awash in relativism, but, he says, it is easy to admire the Pope "when their own personal lives are a comfortable distance from the pope's concrete conclusions." There is no arguing with the fact that it might be easier to be a Catholic theologian were it not necessary to be credibly Catholic. McCormick complains that *Veritatis Splendor* reflects a notion of the Church "as a pyramid where truth and authority flow uniquely from the pinnacle." And it is true that the Catholic Church is constituted hierarchically. According to McCormick, however, Vatican II adopted a "concentric model" of the Church "wherein the reflections of all must flow from the periphery to the center." (No Council text is cited.) Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger said that "theologians of various continents and most varied orientations" had a part in the production of *Veritatis Splendor*. McCormick complains, "It would not be difficult to give a fairly large list of the theologians who were *not* consulted. Some were mentioned earlier and are the very ones whose work is criticized in the encyclical."

Fr. McCormick is, as noted earlier, a formidable keeper of lists. And there are no doubt a good number of theologians who were not invited to help produce an encyclical the purpose of which was to set forth an understanding of morality to which they were publicly and, in some cases, vehemently opposed. One assumes that he is not unhappy because he was not invited to participate in the criticism of the position that he espouses. (Years ago, some flaky theologians expressed admiration for Chairman Mao's "self-criticism" techniques, but not, so far as we know, Fr. McCormick.) Perhaps he is unhappy because, had he and his friends been invited, they might have helped produce an encyclical that put an official stamp of approval on their moral theories—or at least did not criticize

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their teaching.

One expects, however, that Fr. McCormick's dyspeptic trashing of the encyclical and those who affirm it is not because he was not invited as a consultant on the project. Rather, in his "concentric" model of the Church there would seem to be no place for encyclicals, or for any other form of authoritative teaching that might set limits on what can legitimately be presented as Catholic teaching. Any such limits are viewed as a violation of freedom. He concludes his lamentation by citing the complaint of a group of Canadian theologians who shared his pique in reaction to *Veritatis Splendor*: "Such limits on freedom of thought and expression lead to a danger we should be very aware of today, at a time when reflective thought should be very active in order to respond to the needs and ever new problems of our time. These limits on freedom of thought and expression cannot respect what we call academic freedom here."

Inquiring too closely into the meaning of such language—e.g., What are the "ever new problems of our time"?—risks being unkind. The "concentric" model turns out to be one in which the academic guild, rather than Pope and bishops, constitutes the magisterium or teaching authority. In that view, freedom understood as freedom from limits is the highest good. One might think that the result would be anarchy, a situation in which Catholic teaching is whatever a tenured Catholic teacher says it is. Just as likely, however, given the academy's propensity for smelly little orthodoxies (a.k.a. political correctness), the result would be a rigid authoritarianism under which all who hope for advancement, or even security, are compelled to toe the line. The moral rules would be established by those whom the guild certifies as possessing, in Fuchs' revealing phrase, "the requisite intellectual capacity" to determine what is right and wrong. By comparison, the magisterium of Bible, tradition, Pope, and bishops seems ever so much more capacious, companionable, and conducive to freedom. And, of course, that magisterium has the additional merit of being bound by truth in service to the Truth—as in *Veritatis Splendor*.

FT

MORE A REVOLUTION THAN A BLIP

Given our lead time (the time from word processor to printing press), we're always a bit behind the daily press. Which is no big problem since "first things," by definition, do not depend upon the latest word. But herewith a couple of early responses to what some are calling the revolution of November 8. Whether it is a revolution or simply a political reversal that can be as readily reversed two years from now, nobody knows. But within the context of this constitutional order it is much closer to being a revolution than merely a historical blip. All of a sudden, we are living in a significantly different political culture. Certainly the political status of questions impinging strongly on the culture wars—from abortion to school choice to school prayer to racial and gender quotas—changed dramatically from November 7 to November 9.

Most of the media attention has been on Newt Gingrich, and understandably so. The deeper reality may be that the country is returning to congressional rather than presidential government, reversing the pattern established by FDR in 1932. There is no question but that, at least for the present, the policy initiative is with the Congress rather than the White House. As interesting as Speaker Gingrich will undoubtedly be, we look with high expectation to some other changes, for instance, Henry Hyde as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the House. Overnight he goes from being the stalwart champion of a besieged minority devoted to damage control (e.g., the "Hyde Amendment" prohibiting government funding of abortion) to being a critical center of initiative and review on a wide range of policy disputes.

For as long as most of us can remember, the political culture has been Democratic and liberal, with moderate and liberal Republicans forming the permanent minority opposition, and self-identified conservatives on the margin. It is too early to say that conservatism is now the political "mainstream," but it is not too early to say that, for the first time in half a century, there is a solid parity (at both the national and state levels) between Democrats and Republicans, with Republicans having the edge in what pols call "momentum," and with the issue-defining Republican leadership being assertively conservative. It will take most people a while to digest the implications of this sweeping change.

It was widely reported in the press that, at their annual meeting in mid-November, the Catholic bishops attacked the social policy proposals of the new Republican majority. That is not the case. While underscoring that the Church is already heavily engaged in programs addressing the needs of the poor, some bishops did emphasize that the government also has a continuing responsibility in the field of welfare. Fair enough. That is hardly an attack on what Newt Gingrich and others are saying. Of course one wishes that the bishops had more alertly seized upon new opportunities for designing social policies that utilize and strengthen the mediating institutions—family, church, voluntary

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associations, etc. That is the direction strongly encouraged by the Catholic doctrine of "subsidiarity"—the teaching that the authority and mandate for meeting social needs should be located as closely as possible to the people most immediately involved. But, as we said, it will take a while for people, including religious leaders, to digest the implications of a dramatically changed political culture.

David Brooks of the *Wall Street Journal* says the new circumstance is the culmination (at least to date) of the rise of a conservative intellectual and political establishment that has been building for more than twenty years. He writes, "While liberals such as John Judis and E. J. Dionne have actually read the conservative sources, many other liberals, especially in my neighborhood on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, have reacted to the election like gaping victims of a 1950s horror movie: They don't know what this monster is; they don't know where it came from, or how it got so powerful; they only wish it would go away." Brooks' point is that the "monster" has been here a long time now, and it is certainly not going to go away.

His analysis touches on an old friend of ours, the *New York Times*. "The emergence of rival establishments means that the institutions of the old single establishment have lost importance. For example, the *New York Times* was once the paper of record, the voice of the governing New Deal Democrats and liberal Republicans. But that group is gone, and there is no longer a role for a single paramount institution. The *Times* reasonably enough oriented itself toward the upper-middle-class core of Manhattan, the Upper West Side/Greenwich Village liberals. It is still one of the great papers of the world, but it is now one player among others. The more it serves its core audience in Manhattan, the less authority it will have over the rest of the nation."

Catering to its core audience, the editorial and op-ed pages following November 8 carried one unremitting scream of alarm at the appearance of "the monster." Schadenfreude is not nice, but we confess to having rather enjoyed the *Times* for a change. Finally, after ten days of hysteria, the editorial writers did acknowledge on November 18 that Gingrich should get some credit for bypassing the seniority system in appointing some committee chairmen. But that did not change their opposition to his "supremely bad ideas." In an accompanying editorial, we learn that one such supremely bad idea is a school prayer amendment. "The religious right wing has railed for three decades at Supreme Court rulings forbidding state-directed prayer or Bible-reading in public school classes. The Court has made clear that students are free to pray to themselves or even to hold religious meetings in school outside of class. But some religious groups want to pretend that an organized prayer in a classroom can be 'voluntary' and thus not the product of unconstitutional state action." On the Upper West Side maybe people do "pray to themselves."

Andrew Ferguson of *Washingtonian* magazine has come across a memo purportedly sent by the managing editor of a newspaper to his political reporters. The subject is covering the new Congress. The question is, "What are the congressional Republicans?" "My information is admittedly sketchy," says the editor. "I have a call in to Elliot Richardson, an old tennis partner who is himself a Republican, and hopefully he'll be able to flesh out some details. What follows is the information I've gleaned from several casual conversations, including my lunch earlier this week with Dave Gergen. (Incidentally, Dave indicated in the strongest possible terms that contrary to erroneous reports last year, he has always been a Republican and is 'damn proud of it.')" The editor notes that most of the new Republicans "are adherents of the right-wing philosophy of 'conservatism.' Conservatism can be traced to such right-wing thinkers as Franco, Pinochet, and William F. Buckley Jr. Conservatism, in brief, calls for dismantling the entire government while simultaneously controlling the most intimate decisions of a person's life."

Then there is this: "Several sources emphasized that in reporting our stories, we should take care not to call staffers or Congresspersons on Sunday morning, when the vast majority of Americans stay home to watch Brinkley. But apparently many Republicans 'go to church.' Some of you will be familiar with churches in Cleveland Park for their marvelous chamber music concerts. Our new Republican friends, however, go to church for 'services'—patriarchal rituals that date back to the early 1900s or even earlier. This also has something to do with 'turning back the clock,' another right-wing tenet of conservatism."

Surely Mr. Ferguson exaggerates. Viewed from the peaks of the old establishment, however, the new circumstance must look very much the way it looks to his (fictional?) managing editor. Measured sympathy is in order.

FT

WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ From time to time, we have had occasion to comment on the Reconstructionists or, as they are sometimes called, theonomists (see "Why Wait for the Kingdom? The Theonomist Temptation," FT,

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May 1990). The most prominent figure in this movement that advocates the universal applicability of Old Testament law is R. J. Rushdoony, who publishes *Chalcedon Report* out of California. Reconstructionism, in various forms, is not without influence among activists and thinkers in "the religious right." The movement is famously fractious, and for years Rushdoony has been crossing swords with his prolific son-in-law Gary North over questions wondrously exotic. The latest battle is over "geocentrism," the doctrine that the earth is the physical center of the creation. Rushdoony is for it and North is against it. Apparently they are lining up astrophysicists and other scientists to help confirm their conflicting exegesis of Scripture. Is this ridiculous? Those who are truly liberated from political correctness might respond that there are a lot of less-interesting questions that might be debated, and all too often are. Martin G. Selbrede has a "Chalcedon Position Paper" in defense of geocentricism in the October 1994 *Chalcedon Report*, and readers who want to know more about this fast-exploding controversy can write him at 9205 Alabama Ave., Suite E, Chatsworth, CA 91311. If we understand the argument, which is doubtful, Einstein is solidly on the Rushdoony side. Galileo has not been heard from, and reports that Gary North is in contact with him remain unconfirmed.

■ The discussion, both friendly and otherwise, surrounding the declaration "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," which was published in the May 1994 issue, continues to grow. We hope to do a roundup and commentary on related developments in a future installment of The Public Square. Meanwhile, a book titled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* is underway and will be out, we hope, this spring. It will include essays by Charles Colson, Avery Dulles, Mark Noll, James Packer, George Weigel, and your scribe. We just thought you would want to know.

■ Columnist Charles Moore is back from Africa with new horror tales about political corruption and general bloodiness, plus deep forebodings about the future of post-apartheid South Africa. Western-style democracy and civil rights can take root in Africa, he thinks, but only with great difficulty and in a manner that will always be very fragile. There is another dimension of Western influence in Africa, he thinks, that should not be neglected. "Perhaps more attention should be paid to the adoption and adaptation of Western religion, for this has been much more successful than that of Western politics. Yet one would have thought that it must have been equally difficult. If you worship your ancestors and countless spirits of places or plants or animals, if you have lots of wives, if you eat people, the idea that you can have only one God, one spouse, and meat and two veg. must be quite depressing, yet Africa has received it with the joyful enthusiasm which is its peoples' most attractive characteristic. Often, of course, it makes compromises with its existing beliefs. Earlier this year I visited the King of the Zulus and asked his private secretary how many palaces His Majesty possessed. 'Five,' I was told, 'one for each queen.' 'What religion is His Majesty?' 'Anglican.' (How different would our own history have been if Henry VIII had managed to swing that one.) But whether such compromises are any more ludicrous than our own, Western attempts to squeeze through the eye of the needle, I doubt. The point is that mainstream Christianity has retained its doctrinal coherence and become a vital part of African life. Last week I found myself out in the bush. I stood beneath a huge round rock with crows circling its top, in the company of a leper woman, and as the sun set she sang a Shona hymn, hailing Jesus Christ as the one true God. In its sound and in the scenery it was an utterly African moment, yet it was also eloquent of the triumph of the West."

■ The British historian Paul Johnson draws our attention to a new book by A. L. Rowse, *Regicides and the Puritan Revolution*. Rowse notes that there are uncanny paralllels between the intolerant ideologues of the 1640s and 1650s in England and the academic bigots of today who, in the name of political correctness, claim to be expanding freedom when they impose restrictive codes on what people can do and say. Dryden had a fine phrase for describing the hypocrisy of that time and ours: "When real bonds false freedom did impose."

■ Academics talk, others do. Not exactly. There is, for instance, the University Faculty for Life, an ecumenical and interreligious organization with more than five hundred members from faculties around the country. They talk, to be sure. A lot. But they talk and think hard in a way that does a great deal for making effective moral witness on the life questions—abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, et al. The fifth annual meeting of UFL will be June 2 to 4 at Marquette University, Milwaukee. For more information, write Fr. Thomas King, UFL, Box 2273, Georgetown University, Washington D.C. 20057.

■ It's not the usual sort of thing for the *New York Times*, but reporter Alessandra Stanley happened to be in Riga and stumbled on this story with a man-bites-dog twist. Like most Lutheran churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia has been ordaining women for some years. Not any more. Thirty-five-year-old Janis Vanags was elected Archbishop earlier this year, and his opposition to ordaining women was well known at the time. "It is true we need pastors very much," the Archbishop said, "but it is better to do without them than to do something against the will of God." Vanags is

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something of a hero among Latvians. Under the Communists he was a chemist who lost his job and apartment when he began working as a lay preacher. As a pastor he was very much part of the underground before the revolution of 1991. Lutherans in the West, including Latvians in exile, favored another candidate for Archbishop, but the Synod of Bishops resisted and elected Vanags. There is some talk that the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), to which most Lutheran churches belong, might punish the Latvian church for refusing to ordain women. The precedent cited is that in 1984 the LWF suspended two white South African churches for insufficient militancy against apartheid. Archbishop Vanags is unfazed: "I hope they will not go that far. But they cannot tell us what to do. The president of the Lutheran World Federation is not our pope." The status of nine women who were ordained in the past, some of whom are serving as pastors in Latvia, is not entirely clear. One of them, Sarmite Fisere, complains that Vanags reflects the views of the new generation of pastors, who are increasingly conservative. "In my opinion," she said, "Vanags is too young and inexperienced." It is not easy to go back to the wave of the future.

■ We had mentioned that William Safire of the *New York Times* is a libertarian and therefore "of little help with the things that matter most." Which prompted an irate response from a reader who calls himself a libertarian, if not a Libertarian, and directs our attention to Libertarians for Life, an organization formed in 1976 "to show why abortion is aggression under general libertarian principles." For information write 13424 Hathaway Drive, Wheaton, Maryland 20906. One hopes they are in touch with Bill Safire.

■ Mr. P. M. Aliazzi of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, thinks our comment about angels dancing on the head of a pin could do with some refinement. We had said that, since angels are spiritual beings, there is no limit to how many could throw a party on the head of a pin. To our slight chagrin, he reminds us of a brilliant essay by Dorothy Sayers on this precise topic. The appropriate distinction is between occupying space on a needle point and being located on a needle point. It is a question of what is meant by "being there." The analogy she suggests is that an unlimited number of people might concentrate their thoughts on the point of a needle and those thoughts would really be there, but they would not occupy space, and so there is no limit to how many could be there. Thinking about it, I have this sensation of something dancing in my head.

■ "The only form of progressivism is to move backwards into the past—but a past so imaginatively reconstructed that, in reality, it contains the necessary elements of novelty. This is the essential principle behind the development of English law, indeed of English constitutional history as a whole. The present is reformed by rewriting the past in such a way that it becomes the future." That's not a bad summary of the conservative instinct. It's from *The Quotable Paul Johnson*, just published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Then there's this: "The people of the Catholic faith value it not because it is yielding but because it is inflexible; not because it is open-minded but because it is sure; not because it is adaptive and protean but because it is always, everywhere, the same. It is the one fixed point in a changing world; and if it changes itself (as from time to time it must), such transformations must be as imperceptible as a glacier's, moving with majestic gravity along a path preordained by its own nature. Catholicism has the time-scale not of fashion but of geology." Well, alright, just one more: "Generous-minded Victorians, who took big risks by publicly expressing their concern for the poor, did not pretend that they knew everything about the problem or propose specific solutions. They had no Boards of Social Responsibility or heavily-financed commissions producing massive studies. . . . But they did understand the nature and value of moral leadership, and provided it according to their lights. As a result they were listened to and occasionally heeded: indeed, their collective impact was considerable and salutary. But of course they had a considerable advantage over their successors today: their belief in God was still solid and they had no need to turn to political dogma as a substitute." It is getting to be the case in some circles today that, when you allude to something that "Dr. Johnson" said, you have to specificy Samuel, not Paul. *The Quotable Paul Johnson* will undoubtedly multiply the number of people who find themselves in such circles.

■ The Rev. Gerald Anderson, a Methodist pastor in Atlanta, writes to say "The Public Square is without doubt the wittiest thing being done by any writer in religion today." Thank you, I'm sure, but the compliment puts me in mind of Dr. Johnson on Lord Chesterfield: "This man, I thought, had been a Lord among wits; but, I find, he is only a wit among Lords."

Sources: Tom Burns on John Paul II, *Tablet*, October 22, 1994. Barbara von der Heydt on Russia, *Policy Review*, Fall 1994. Comments on Gerry Adams, *Spectator*, October 1 and October 15, 1994. David Brooks on the rise of the new conservative establishment and Andrew Ferguson on the latest Washington memo, *Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 1994; *New York Times* editorials on Newt Gingrich and school prayer, November 18, 1994.

WHILE WE'RE AT IT: Charles Moore on Africa, *Spectator*, August 13, 1994. Paul Johnson on A.L. Rowse observation about political correctness, *Spectator*, October 1, 1994. On Lutherans in Latvia, *New York Times*, August 3, 1994.

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Australopithecus afarensis

Lucy—
The ph.d.'s with picks and brushes
sketched you up from your bones
your strangely tilted pelvis and knocked knees
suggest you'd become the first biped

So, they've found the one nomadic Mother of us All
and they wanted to call you something suitable

Mother, we all have our reasons
for not calling you Eve

what have I in common with the
lily-like gamine of Eden
bald of thigh, skin as taut
and flushed as a ripe peach
who ambles about the Garden
inventing names for the creeping things
and tasting the sun-sweetened
ovaries of trees?

But you I could hold—
I Name You!
the mere three feet of you

Let's get together and talk
cellulite, crows feet and
breasts that are not her
pert round buds.

I could ask you
what I would love to know
of my Mother—

what gave you the courage
little tree-climbing nut-gathering girl
to lift your knuckles from the ground
after crawling for millions of years—
to walk upright with your breasts out front
and—oh, Lucille!—to cherish one Adam
in all those Neanderthals?

Jenny Sheffer Stevens

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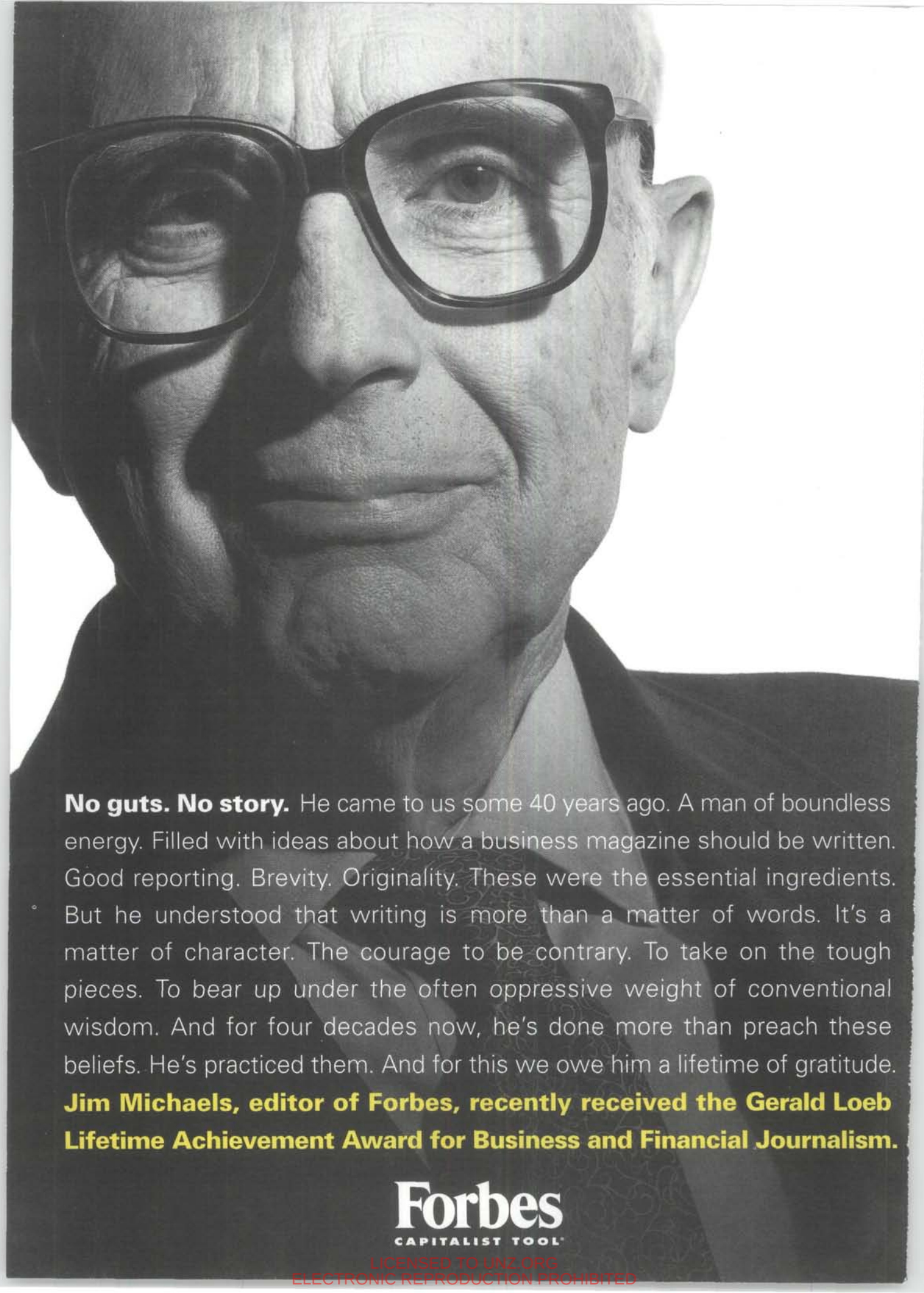

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